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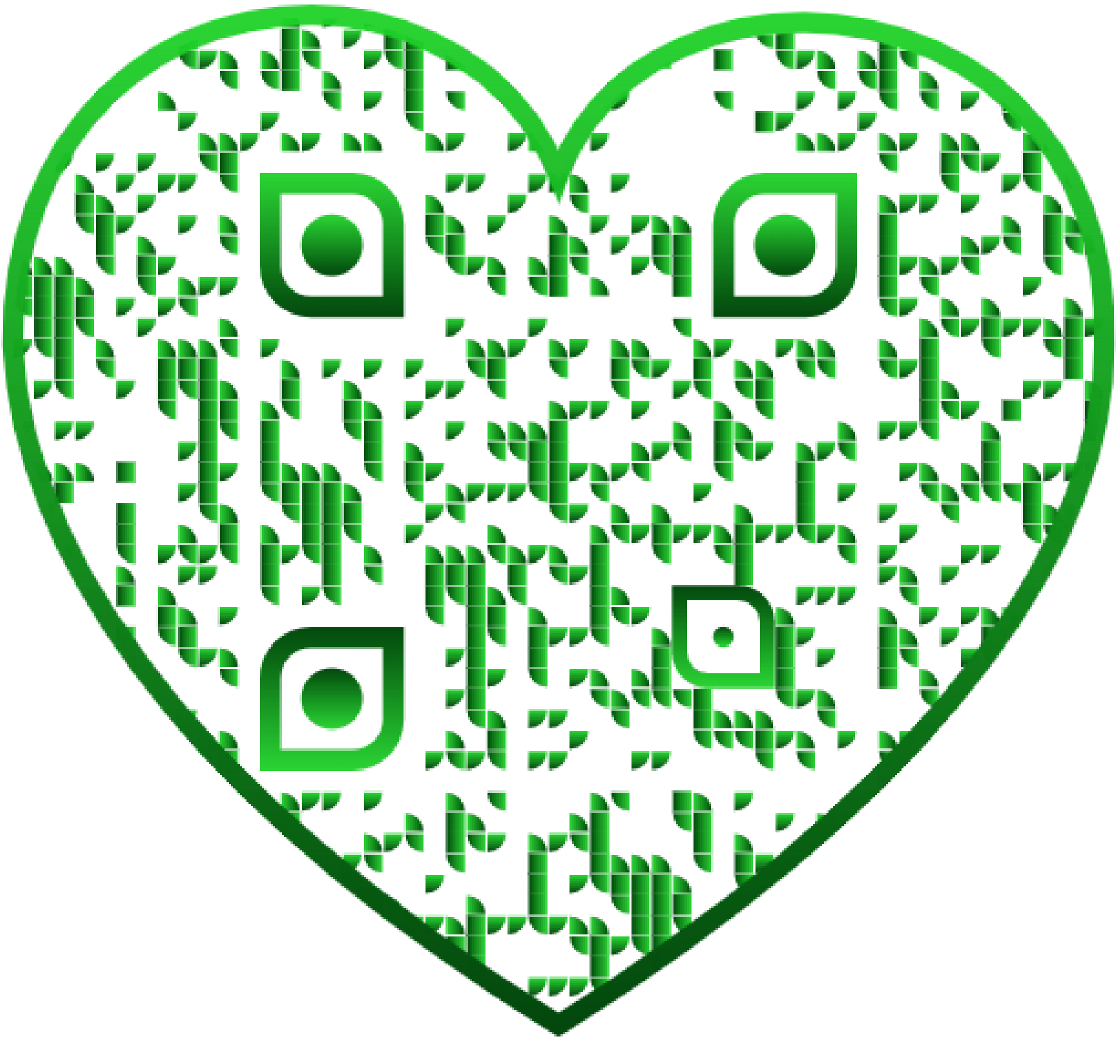

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A warm welcome

For the people

We are excited to share with you in this latest issue of *AG* lots of lovely suggestions for great gardens to visit across the land. June is an especially lovely time to start exploring, to walk around and immerse yourself in many of the inspiring gardens that throw wide their gates to the general public. From the National Garden Scheme home garden open days, to sprawling botanic estates, the process of taking time out to walk around and explore different, exciting plant playgrounds in this way lifts the spirits and provides us with so much horticultural and creative inspiration as a result.

I love the fact that you can learn so much from hands-on visits and at the same time momentarily pause thoughts of all the things you need to do at home. The process of exploring and walking around may give you inspiration for projects to try yourself, it can get the creative juices going and help ideas flow in and, last but by no means least, offer the chance to sample a spot of afternoon tea and cake to help with your decision making. You may even be able to buy some new plants to boost your own collection.

It's also lovely to attend local garden plant sales, and visit gardening groups and shows and, more often than not, meet other gardeners and share the loveliness and joy (not forgetting complexities) of our favourite pastime. Excitable plant chatter is near guaranteed and sharing the love of the natural world with like-minded people helps us all grow and solve problems together in a really meaningful and uplifting way. Let's have as much of this as we can this year - real-time gardening greatness to soak in, soothe and uplift the soul.

Since the last issue and our attendance at Toby Buckland's fantastic Garden Festival at Powderham Castle in Devon, I have received lots of emails from readers asking if we can attend other shows around the UK. It was so lovely for Ruth and I to meet hundreds of keen readers during the two-day floral extravaganza, to chat in the sunshine and answer questions in our 'Ask the Experts' area. It felt like a very important moment and such community involvement is a key part of the friendly feel and ethos of the magazine, so we would definitely like to do more of this in future. Thank you to everyone who emailed and wrote in - your ideas have been duly noted. Watch this space!

In this issue our merry band of brilliant expert *AG* contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Sue Bradley, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Andrew Oldham, Liz Zorab, Chris Collins, Rosie Irving, Kim O'Brien and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy everything we have put together for you.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of *AG* continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart *AG*'s editor-in-chief

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Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

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STIGA tools are proving essential during the work at Birmingham Botanical Gardens

Amateur Gardening on the road

Readers flock to *AG* festival stand to say ‘hello’

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Kim and Ruth on the *AG* stand at Toby’s Garden Festival in May

The return to outside events by *Amateur Gardening* started in brilliant fashion when the magazine received a rapturous reception at Toby Buckland’s Garden Festival in Devon.

AG editor Kim Stoddart and deputy editor Ruth Hayes were at the hugely popular bank holiday event at Powderham Castle to meet readers, and both were overwhelmed by the response.

Hundreds of people visited the *AG* stall to say hello, ask questions and share their thoughts about the magazine itself.

Kim said: “It was incredible. It was the first time we had done anything like this with *Amateur Gardening* so we didn’t know what to expect, but the response from readers was marvellous, really, really positive.

“There was so much love for the magazine, so many joyful and uplifting comments that Ruth and I were thrilled. Thank you to everyone who came to see us.”

Many of the visitors to the stall said they appreciated the sustainable, resilient and organic direction the magazine is taking, and that they liked the down to earth gardening approach where even things that go wrong get an airing.

Ruth added: “It was a wonderful weekend, and really refreshing to hear the magazine referred to as ‘the friendliest magazine with real gardening for real people’. We so enjoyed meeting readers old and new, and it is lovely to see such high regard for the magazine.”

Since the event we’ve had lots and lots of readers writing in to request that we do something similar around the UK so this has been duly noted. Kim explained: “We’re a magazine for gardeners everywhere so it only seems right that we take to the road with Amateur Gardening and visit some more events and gardening communities around the UK. What fun that will be! Watch this space for further developments!”

STIGA helps botanical garden renovations

Power tool experts STIGA have donated a robot mower and petrol chainsaw to Birmingham Botanical Gardens as part of its *We Care That You Care* campaign.

This comes as the Gardens are preparing for major capital development with support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, aimed at restoring the historic glasshouse estate and transforming the gardens into a leading centre for horticulture, sustainability and community engagement.

Bethan Collerton, senior nursery horticulturist at the gardens, said: “We’re preparing for our capital project to rebuild our historic glasshouses, and tools like the robot mower are helping us redirect our time and energy towards that.”

London’s secret green spaces

Discover hidden horticultural histories, secret spaces and pioneering people during the 26th London Open Gardens (LOG) on June 7 and 8.

Now in its 26th year, the weekend is all about understanding and protecting the green heritage which has made London liveable throughout history.

London Open Gardens chairman Nathan Oley said: “London Open Gardens is a celebration of the capital’s green lungs.”

Adult Weekend Standard tickets cost £24, children aged 12 to 17 cost £10, under 11s are free. All walks and tours tickets cost £5, book at www.londongardenstrust.org

Right: For one weekend you can see London from Battersea Roof Gardens

Compost festival is a first for Cambo

The next gardening festival to take place at Cambo Gardens in Fife, Scotland, can be broken down into one word - compostable!

Composted – a festival of biodegradable ideas, runs from May 31 to June 27 and aims to connect gardeners, scientists, and environmentalists, as well as the local community, in celebration of the importance of compost.

Highlights include a self-guided garden trail and compost studio showcasing approaches to composting large and small, plus workshops and a lecture by Michael Kennard of Compost Club, who has appeared on *Gardeners’ World*.

You will also be able to peer at the tiny living creatures that live inside compost and you can take home a Cambo compost ‘mother’ to develop your own compost heap at home.

Above: A world of worms and compost will be unveiled at Composted

Cambo Heritage Trust boss Keri Ivins said: “Composted is a fantastic programme to highlight and celebrate the unseen life in our soil and promote discussion and action on ways we can support biodiversity in large, small and creative ways.

“We believe this is the UK’s first compost festival so join us to make it a good one!”

For a full festival itinerary visit www.cambogardens.org.uk/whats-on

The Government is urging people to use water wisely to conserve levels

© Shutterstock

Water safeguards needed after a record dry start to the spring

Gardeners called upon to harvest water and use it wisely

Water companies are being asked to do more to safeguard the UK's water supplies after the driest start to spring in 69 years.

In England, March 2025 was the driest since 1961 and April received just half its normal rainfall. We also had the hottest ever May Day on record, with temperatures touching 29.3 degrees Celsius (84.7 degrees Fahrenheit) at Kew Gardens in London.

At a meeting of MPs, conservationists, water companies and farming leaders, Environment Agency Deputy Director of Water, Richard Thompson, said: "The changing climate means we will see more summer droughts in the coming decades.

"The last two years were some of the wettest on record for England but drier conditions at the start of this year mean a drought is a possibility and we need to be prepared."

Although there is no current need for hosepipe bans, if dry weather continues, water companies may need to implement their dry weather plans later in the year.

While the Government is encouraging water companies to mend leaking pipes and working with farmers to assess their irrigation needs, there are several things gardeners can do to save water.

A Defra representative said: "The public can play their part too by reducing individual water consumption, such as installing a water butt in the garden to harvest rainwater, taking shorter showers and turning off taps when not in use."

■ Ruth Hayes looks at some of the best ways to save water at home and in the garden on page 8.

Solutions to the most common gardening errors

The UK's top gardening mistakes have been laid bare - but gardening expert Jane Moore on behalf of STIHL is on hand to help people put them right.

Jane said: "We all make mistakes from time to time, even seasoned gardeners – that's how we learn."

The top 5 mistakes are:

- **Leaving weeds too long:** they crowd out cultivated plants, stealing moisture, food and light. Dig them out as soon as you can.
- **Underwatering:** Light watering encourages roots to stay close to the surface. Water generously instead, soaking the soil so roots quest deeply and anchor the plant.
- **Overwatering:** This forces oxygen from soil and compost, drowning plants. Avoid this by checking dampness under the plant before watering again.
- **Spacing plants too closely:** Crammed plants compete for water and food and are more susceptible to pests and diseases. Give them room to grow healthily.
- **Ignoring fallen leaves:** Autumn leaves can cause yellow patches on the lawn and create pest habitats, so rake them up and make leaf mould.

Above: Dig up weeds before they threaten to take over

The importance of biodiversity will be highlighted by Garden Organic

Charity's BBC garden champions biodiversity

Sustainable gardening charity Garden Organic is displaying its Ecotalk 'Rooted in Nature' Garden at BBC Gardeners' World Live (June 12 to 15) at Birmingham NEC.

The garden, sponsored by green mobile network Ecotalk, shows how diversely planted kitchen gardens can buffer the biodiversity crisis.

Based on the charity's research paper *Every Garden Matters*, the show garden illustrates easy ways to maximise wildlife and manage water while growing your own food.

There will be a veg patch, companion plants, bug hotel, wildlife pond and permaculture planting area.

Ancient burial cairn recreated by technology

Visitors to the remains of a Neolithic cairn in Scotland can now see it in its original state thanks to the miracles of technology.

A pile of stones is all that remains of the ancient structure of Boreland in Knockman Wood, Galloway.

But thanks to hundreds of photos taken by drones, experts have created a 3D image of how it looked when it was built 6,000 years ago.

Archaeologist Matt Ritchie said it is thought the building was used as a place to bury the dead and also pay their respects.

He added: "Studies of these chambered cairns can reveal only the bare bones of their story. But they were built by a vibrant ancient society with beliefs, traditions and practices."

For full details visit forestryandland.gov.scot and search for Knockman Wood.

© Marcus Abbott

Right: The 3D visualisation of Boreland Cairn

Are you involved in community growing projects where you live? Send in your news by emailing **editor@amateurgardening.com**

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert **Ruth Hayes**

One of our water butts is attached to the greenhouse making it easy to water the veg patch

Inset: Collect grey water that doesn't contain bleach or too many food particles

How to be water-wise this summer

Whatever the weather, don't waste this precious commodity

Watch where you spray to avoid wasting water

Here's a question - although gardening is one of the best ways to connect with the natural world and improve our mental and physical wellbeing, why are gardeners never completely happy with their lot?

We can be the stewards of our own glorious, productive patches, be they garden, allotment, patio or balcony, yet always find an imaginary cloud somewhere to grumble about.

My current bugbear is water. Having spent the winter wondering 'will it ever stop raining?' as the water meadows and winterbourne streams surrounding the town filled to the brim, I'm now starting to worry about having sufficient water to keep the garden flourishing through summer.

We have several water butts including two attached to the shed and two connected ones harvesting rain from the garage roof, but it's amazing how quickly these can run dry in summer, especially if we also need to top up the pond.

Easy watering hacks

I'm writing this at the end of a very dry April and haven't a clue what weather the next few weeks will bring, though having said that our current weather pattern seems to be glorious springs, rubbish summers and prolonged golden autumns, so who knows.

But whatever the summer delivers this year, it's worth preparing for dry spells so you aren't caught short if it turns dry.

There are several easy hacks we use to save household water for the garden, the first being the collection of grey water from washing up less dirty crocks after a meal.

We also collect water from the hot tap as it's heating up and recently invested in a dehumidifier, the instructions for which state we can use the water in the garden but not on edible plants.

There's also nothing wrong with having a bucket in the shower to catch run-off, just be careful when carrying it down the stairs and outside!

Wise ways of watering

The last piece of advice is to be water-wise, and think about when you water and how you water.

Cooler mornings and evenings are prime watering times as it will be slower to evaporate and when you water, a good drenching every few days is much better for the plants than a feeble dribble every day.

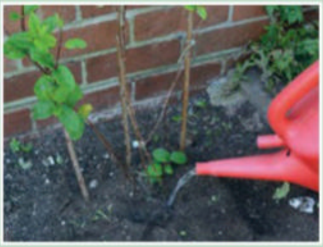
Soaking the soil encourages the roots to sink lower to collect the water, creating more resilient plants, whereas those with roots near the surface are more at risk from disturbance and instability.

Don't spray willy-nilly - focus on the soil around the base of the stem and keep water off the leaves. Your plants will thank you, and flourish.

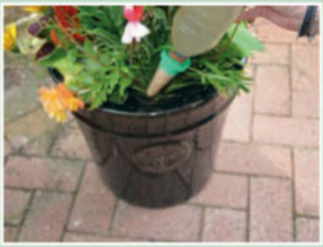
Watering solutions

1 I keep our water butts healthy using Envii Water Butt Klear tablets. They also help to feed plants.

2 Don't waste water from the hot tap while it's heating up - collect it and use it in the garden.



3 Water runs off very dry soil so build a small moat around thirsty plants to hold water while it soaks in.

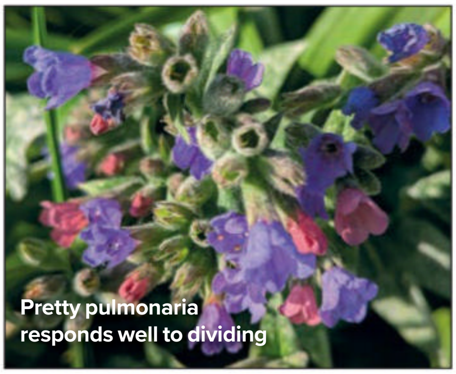


4 Keep containers fed and watered using a plastic bottle filled with water and feed attached to a ceramic cone.

Divide mature and straggly early perennials like primroses to give them a boost and make more plants

Dividing early-flowering perennials

Breathe new life into tired plants once they have bloomed



Pretty pulmonaria responds well to dividing

I love it when the brown drudge of winter makes way for the vibrant verdancy of spring and the first early flowers come into their own.

In our garden the cheery primroses are spreading through the rockery and wild lawn with abandon and the pulmonarias flower in shades of blue and pink above their green and freckled leaves.

It's a real feast for the eyes, but after the flush of flowers the more established clumps of both these reliable perennials tend to lose their shape and pep.

The easiest solution is to lift and split them and either replant the divisions around the garden or share them with friends.

Dividing perennials is an easy form of propagation and breathes new life into old, tired plants. As long as all the divisions have healthy top growth and roots they will quickly settle in to their new homes and start to grow with gusto.

They may look a bit droopy for a day or so afterwards, but don't be alarmed, they will soon perk up.

Another perennial that needs some post-flowering love is knapweed, which often splays outwards leaving its unattractive woody heart on view.

It sounds brutal, but the easiest way to remedy this is to cut back all the old stems and leaves and feed with a general liquid fertiliser. New leaves will soon emerge, followed by a second glorious flush of flowers later in summer.

Two quick jobs for now

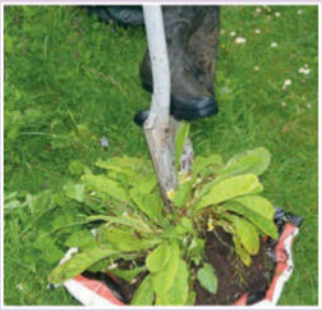
Keep plants healthy and productive

1 We use a lot of homemade compost and sometimes it contains weed seeds along with all the goodness it provides. Nab them early, especially around strappy plants like shallots and garlic, and leave them to rot down on the soil as a quick green manure.

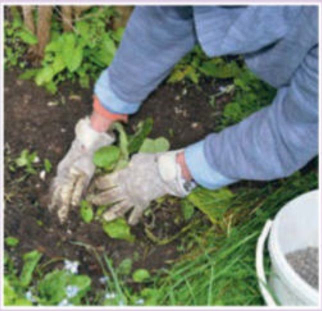
2 Pinch out the growing tips of chrysanthemums to encourage bushing to produce more flowers. Or you could disbud them, removing all side shoots from stems leaving just the top (terminal) one to produce a single large flower - or go the other way and create a spray of blooms by removing the top bud and leaving the side ones. The choice is yours!

Dividing primroses after flowering

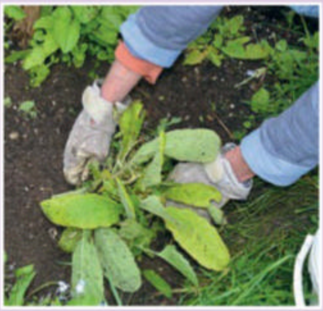
Step by step



1 Carefully dig up your primrose, place it on a bag or board and split it into healthy divisions using your spade or sharp knife.



2 Add some compost or general fertiliser to the hole and plant the divisions at the same depth as they were growing before.



3 Infill around the roots with a mix of compost and soil and firm down the mix to knock out air pockets and support the plants.

4 Give the soil a good soaking and keep it damp while the plants re-establish. Watch out for weeds and your primrose will thrive.

Is there a more fun summer job than planting patio pots and hanging baskets?
Inset: **Check compost for snail eggs before planting and add them to the bird table.**

Get your best patio pots this year

Look forward to months of colour with properly cared-for pots and baskets

The greenhouse is experiencing a severe case of overload so the time is ripe to start planting out some of the plug plants and seedlings that are large enough.

With the mild April we experienced here in the south, I was able to harden off the plants with the easiest possible technique - leaving the greenhouse door increasingly open at night so everything inside became accustomed to a range of temperatures.

However, we are not out of the woods yet and shock frosts can still hit, especially further north and in exposed areas.

Although it's so tempting to plant out, being over-cautious is still better than being over-confident for a couple more weeks and if you really can't wait, and it's practical to do so, move planted-up containers into the greenhouse at night, or move them against a sheltered wall and drape fleece over the top.

There are a couple of things to remember when planting containers, mainly concerning feeding and watering.

Some peat-free potting composts, like Dalefoot wool compost, hold onto moisture in much the same way that peat does, so plants need less watering and the packaging says no extra feed is needed.

Other peat-free composts can look dry on the surface but have held onto moisture further down. To avoid overwatering, stick a finger into the compost and do a touch test to see whether it is dry and needs more water, or not.

You may also wish to feed every 10 days with a liquid tomato fertiliser to help boost and prolong flowering - and don't forget to deadhead regularly.

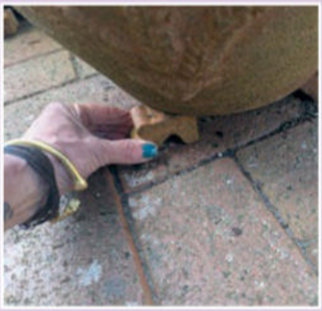
The joy of planting pots

1 Don't forget 'thriller, filler, spiller' and include an eye-catching central plant, colourful fillers and trailing beauties such as fuchsias and petunias to flow down the sides.

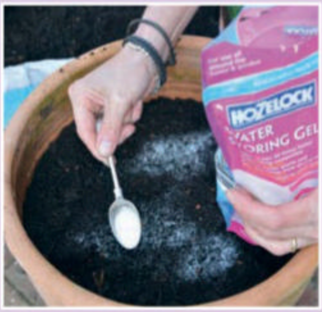
2 Always water after planting, even if rain is forecast. It helps settle the compost and hydrates the roots.

Tips for top pots Keeping pots flourishing all summer

Step by step



1 I raise my pots on feet for drainage before I start filling them, so I don't risk injury trying to do so later on when they are full and heavy.



2 Water-retaining granules added to the compost hold onto and slowly release moisture so you can water less frequently.

3 Deadhead container and basket plants as soon as flowers start to fade to encourage fresh buds and a longer blooming season.

4 Water tends to run off very dry compost but a couple of drops of washing up liquid breaks the surface tension so it is easily absorbed.

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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Tasty tomatoes, plug plant saviours, protective netting and growing luffas

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

Lucy explains how to help boost results with outdoor tomato growing

While those of us with greenhouses or polytunnels are probably looking at tomato plants 1-1.2m (3-4ft) tall, growers who choose to plant their toms outside are only really able to do so now. That's no problem though, because despite UK summers not being identical to those in the Mediterranean, these days our weather does fall more often in that direction when it comes to supplying sunshine and warmth. There are also many other tricks gardeners can use to ensure that growing tomatoes outdoors isn't a gamble. Let me share a few with you.

Choosing appropriate varieties helps secure success – there are those that mature early, thus being more likely to ripen in a cooler summer, and others that show strong resistance to late blight, the fungal disease that can otherwise obliterate outdoor tomatoes during any humid, wet July or August weather fronts. I find that many of the compact 'patio' tomato varieties mature earlier than traditional cordon (indeterminate) types.

'Veranda Red' is a favourite upright form for me, and 'Losetto' is a great cascading type (this one also, handily, has blight resistance). 'Czech Bush' and 'Sub Arctic Plenty' both hail from cooler climes and ripen early, too. Varieties with late blight resistance are becoming more numerous – 'Cocktail Crush', 'Crimson Crush', 'Consuelo' and 'Merrygold' are just a few to choose from – there are many more – if you've not grown these this year, take heart as garden centres now sell very good veg plant ranges (*tip: look for plants already flowering so you gain fruit as early as possible).

Location of your tomatoes is also key – a sunny, warm, sheltered and (ideally) dry spot is perfect. Of course, in such a location you'll need to feed and water your plants well – liquid high-potash feeds always work well for me, and make a note to check plants' water needs every day or so (those in pots will need more frequent irrigation than toms in the ground). But be reassured that this location will maximise plant growth, boost fruit sugar levels and deter late blight strikes.

Sow seeds or buy plug plants?

Gone are the days of pointing a judgemental finger at folk who buy veggies as plug plants – thank goodness! Everyone should feel able to grow their own food, and if you haven't time, room or opportunity to grow everything from seed, so what?! Weddings, operations or house moves can all delay your spring plans, so get those plugs in your trolley guilt-free if you need to do so.

Of course, you can still sow as well, but there are some edibles that take a while to bulk up. I had abysmal parsley germination in March, so I've just bought these plug plants. Celeriac, celery, chillies, peppers, aubergines and tomatoes, too, would be best bought as plugs now as they're all pretty slow to mature. Speedy seeds to sow now would be all salads and leaves, plus runner and French beans. Those in warm spots can also sow courgettes and sweetcorn.

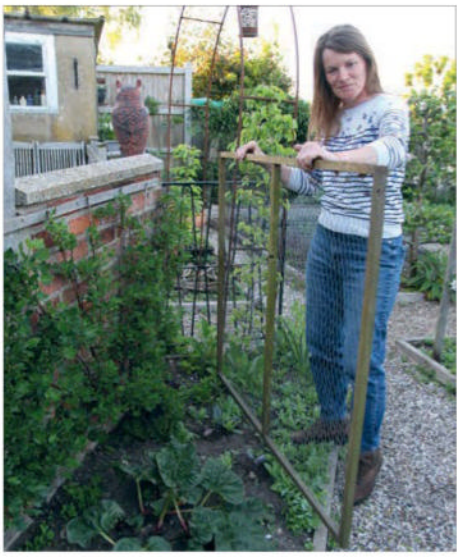
Lucy bought parsley plug plants after poor results with home sowing

All images unless otherwise credited © Lucy Chamberlain

Step by step Net fruits responsibly

If there's one thing that ruffles my horticultural feathers, it's seeing fruit trees and bushes lazily netted. It's not the casualness that offends me, but the fact that netting just tossed onto plants is a real hazard for birds as they can get caught up in it and die. So, preaching over, how do I net my fruits at home? I'll show you, with pleasure.

1 I do own lengths of loose netting, but I don't use it for birds – I just keep this 5x5mm (1/4in) mesh netting handy to place over my brassicas when cabbage whites are on the wing (see my first quick job, overleaf). If you use it, attach it to a rigid frame (a staple gun makes quick work of this job).



2 By far my most common way to net fruit is by using these wooden frames, which have 2.5cm (1in) galvanised mesh attached to them. I've got them in various sizes – 1x1.5m (3x5ft) to go over my individual fan-trained gooseberries, and larger to build a frame over my blueberry bed. Make them bespoke for your plot – they work well and store easily.

3 A lot of my fruit is wall-trained to make cloaking it in the mesh frames simple – but that's not always possible. I've inherited a huge cherry tree in my garden and it's impossible to cloak, so for me this is where karma comes in: I protect the fruit I want my family to eat, then let the birds help themselves to the cherries from this tree. Then we're all happy!.

Top tip

Watch for asparagus beetle

✿Lovers of fresh asparagus may have indulged their passion by planting some crowns of this delicious perennial vegetable. Harvests will now be in full swing, and annoyingly we're not the only ones giving this crop our attention.

Asparagus beetles become increasingly active as the weather warms, and while the black egg clusters can easily be rubbed off the emerging spears, the resulting larvae can weaken beds once they begin eating the foliage (called 'fern').

I took my last cut of asparagus spears a week or so ago, and now the fern is starting to develop. It's at this point I get my scrutinising eyes on, and I regularly watch over the fern, looking for the black egg masses, the adult beetles that lay them, or the grey/black larvae. These are then rubbed off (or blasted with a jet of water) so that populations remain in check.

Right: Asparagus beetle larvae will weaken plants so keep your eyes peeled

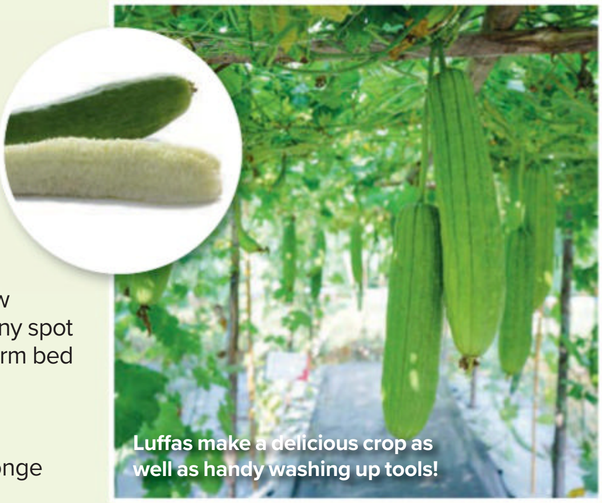
Inset image © Shutterstock

Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with **Lucy Chamberlain**, AG's fruit and veg expert

Why not try...?

Luffas


Luffas make a delicious crop as well as handy washing up tools!

✿ I know that many of us are now growing luffas because the dried fruits make good alternatives to plastic kitchen scourers and bath sponges, but have you tried eating a few of the young fruits, too?

These climbing squashes grow much like a vigorous cucumber – and they love exactly the same growing conditions (i.e. hot and humid). Because of their rampant growth rate given warmth, it's not too late to sow some seeds now – one per 10cm (4in) pot. Move up to a larger pot or sunny spot in a greenhouse or polytunnel border once large enough (a sheltered, warm bed outside will also work) and then train the stems up twine, canes or similar.

Bright yellow flowers are followed by oblong fruits, and these can be harvested whilst the size of a large courgette or carrot, to be sliced into meals such as curries. Remember to leave a few fruits to mature, for sponge production, too.

5 quick jobs...

1 Keep your brassica plants protected from cabbage white butterflies if you have had plants stripped in the past. Butterfly netting (5x5mm/1/4in mesh size) is ideal, held over plants with a frame. Increase the frame size as plants grow, otherwise female butterflies can land on the net and lay eggs onto any leaves pressed against it.

2 Are you a fan of growing fruit in pots? These plants need all their nutritional and water needs supplied directly to do well, so keep irrigation levels topped up – especially during fruit swell – and switch from a nitrogen-based feed to a formulation higher in potash to aid crop formation (liquid tomato fertiliser is ideal).

3 Courgette, pumpkin and squash plants will be romping away. Fruits may be yet to form, but if you're getting impatient the flowers and shoot tips are edible. Tempura the tips for a tasty supper. Stuff the blooms with herb-flavoured cheese, then tie them up, coat them in egg then breadcrumbs, then fry – I promise, all utterly delish!

4 Fancy some broccoli but don't want to wait? Then put packets of conventional calabrese aside, and reach for seeds of broccoli raab (also called rapini) instead. Sow directly (a shadier spot is handy now it's warmer) then keep well-watered and expect pickings in four to five weeks.

5 Did you plant your first early potatoes in early March? You may well be due a harvest now if you poke around, especially if your plants have just bloomed (which can be a sign of maturity – but not always!). Rather than uproot plants then be disappointed, gently explore with a hand fork to see if you can unearth hidden gems.

All images © Shutterstock

How to make your own wormery

Chris Collins shows you how to save money and make your own easy worm bin

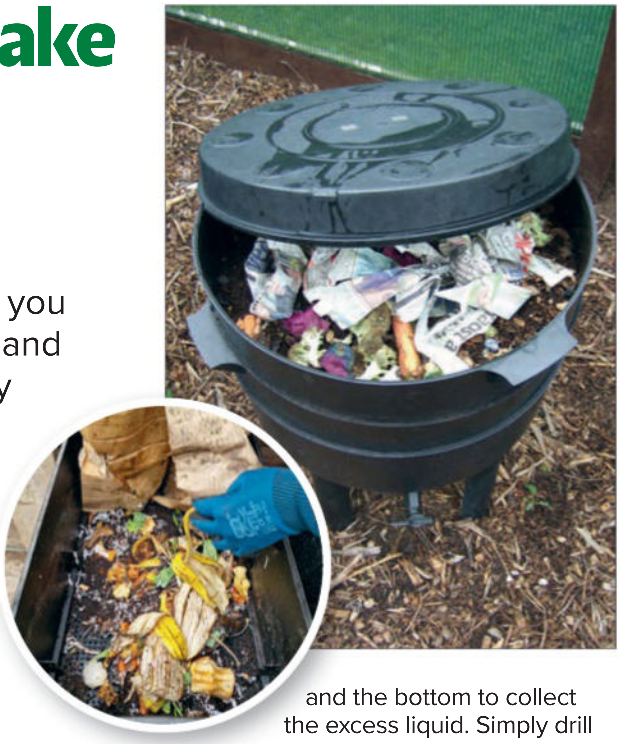
Compost creatures have always fascinated me – and none more so that the humble worm. In a compost bin, these are not earthworms however, but smaller, redder 'brandling' or composting worms (*Eisenia foetida*). And they do a fantastic job of turning your kitchen waste into a valuable and free soil conditioner.

If you don't have space for a compost bin, a wormery is an ideal way to recycle small amounts of food waste all year round. Worm composting relies on worms consuming organic material and breaking it down in their gut, and it's these 'worm casts' that become nutritious compost for your garden.

Ready-made wormeries are purpose-built and come complete with taps to siphon off the liquid feed, but they can be expensive. So why not have a go at making your own?

How to get started

All you need are three stacking trays: the top one for adding material, the middle one for the worms and for processing, and the bottom to collect the excess liquid. Simply drill holes every few centimetres in the top two trays (sand around the holes so there's no sharp edges) and place the third tray (with no holes) on the bottom. Cover the top tray with five double sheets of newspaper, and this will stop the worms leaving the tray until they get used to it.



A wormery needs 1,000 worms

Now you just need worms! Composting worms can be bought from fishing shops and specialist suppliers but if you already have a compost heap, or a neighbour has one, you can also transfer them. You need about 1,000 worms (500g).

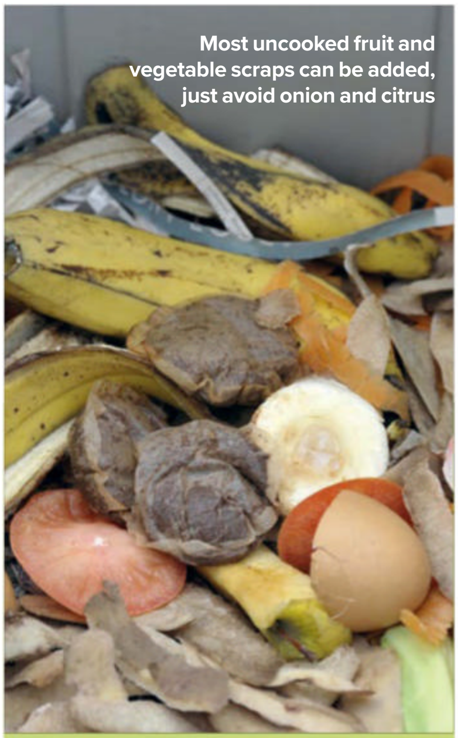
Once they've acclimatised to their new home, simply start adding materials to the top tray as you would a compost heap. This needs to be a mix of kitchen scraps, as well as eggshells, and torn paper/cardboard.

In no time at all, you'll be benefiting from this nutrient-rich 'vermicompost'. You can use it as a top dressing on veg beds and containers (houseplants love it) and don't forget to siphon off that valuable and free 'worm tea' fertiliser too!

For more advice on organic gardening head to **www.gardenorganic.org.uk**, where you can also find out how to become a member and support the charity.

Just add torn newspaper and kitchen scraps to create your own free and fantastic 'vermicompost' and 'worm tea' fertiliser

All images unless stated © Chris Collins Garden Organic



Most uncooked fruit and vegetable scraps can be added, just avoid onion and citrus

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Chris's Q&As

Q What can I put in a worm bin?

A My favourite worm foods include vegetable peelings, tea leaves, eggshells, pasta, soft plant waste and coffee grounds. Paper is important for creating air pockets. Avoid onions and citrus, as these can turn the wormery acidic, and leave out cooked food and dairy products as this can attract flies and rats.

Q Where is the best place for my wormery?

A Worms prefer a bit of shade, so pop it in a sheltered spot away from direct sunlight. In the winter, you can move it into a warmer garage/shed or porch/balcony. Luckily, a healthy wormery doesn't smell!

Q How often should I be adding to my wormery?

A It's best to leave the wormery for two weeks to let the worms get used to their new home, then add food every couple of days. The ideal temperature range is between 12-25C. Wormery contents should feel damp, so add or remove paper to suit conditions.

5 ways to protect plants and gardens this summer

Editor and multi award-winning resilient-gardening expert **Kim Stoddart** explains how to shore up the defences naturally

Kim explains how to know when to allow the natural world in to lend a helping hand

© Kim Stoddart

We really are being tested in so many ways right now. From the doom and gloom of the daily news to the unpredictability of the weather and gardening year in hand. That said, hasn't the weather been lovely so far, such a tonic after the sogginess of the year before and the challenging winter we experienced.

The old phrase 'make hay while the sun shines' has never felt more appropriate as the warmth and light bring much-needed joy, so let's bask in the sunlight a little longer before I reveal some of the challenges that this year has also presented thus far. It's lovely to see how bright everything looks and how even the grumpiest of neighbours can be seen to soften in this early season heat.

Yes, our weather systems are becoming increasingly erratic and 'stuck', which means being prepared for anything is absolutely key. Looking after yourself and others also goes a long way, as does making the best of the here and now as much as we can. If that means replacing some crispy seedlings with plug plants as Lucy Chamberlain suggests on page 12, then so be it. Let's ditch the guilt and look at how we can best enjoy and flourish with our gardens in the year ahead.

Working with extra rampant weeds

Sun-loving, fast-growing wild plants such as hairy bittercress and dandelions have shot up, flowered and seeded the moment our backs were turned. While No Mow May is increasingly popular for good reason, and longer grass provides many benefits for wildlife, every year is different. Looking back to the month just gone, if I hadn't removed the hairy bittercress and dandelions with some super quick pathway strimming near the veg patch, I would have been inundated for years to come.

I welcome weeds with gusto elsewhere for their biodiversity, but there has to be a balance and this year a little more careful cutting back was urgently required.

Tip - If you find that you have too many weeds growing in your beds and borders, you can hoe off the tops and then apply a layer of cardboard which, when soaked with water and covered with compost, will help knock them back. You don't have to cover a whole bed, you can use impromptu no-dig patches around existing beds as and when needed if you apply a mulch on top to hold it down. Toby Buckland explains how he's dealing with his rampant gravel weeds on page 62.

Protect the soil from drying out

Bare soil is always more vulnerable to the elements, be it an excess of rain or the glare of the sun, so covering it where we can really helps to afford protection. Over winter this can be green manures, a cover or compost and now, as we are busy planting out, the more we can fill gaps the better. This can be through the use of mulches around plantings, which really helps to lock moisture into the ground for longer, thereby reducing the amount of watering you need to do.

Ruth Hayes offers watering tips on page 8 and the deeper you water the better, as it can then be held in the soil for longer with mulch. Materials which can help in this way include everything from a thin layer of wood chip or grass clippings, leaf mould, chop and drop leaves, cardboard or compost (new or from last year) and mole hill soil.

TIP Having perennial planting in the soil already will afford protection, casting shade and helping to improve the soil structure below.

You have to be super quick with hairy bittercress as before you know it the explosive seed pods will form and spread

Use screens or shade planting

As the season progresses, too much sun can cause issues for plants so some shade netting can be used as a valuable ally, especially in greenhouses and polytunnels where the temperatures can quickly soar and scorch your seedlings.

All images unless stated © Shutterstock

When cutting back grass or weeds just be careful to check for wildlife first to keep them safe

Longer grass with a few weeds growing in it has greater resilience against drought and doesn't need watering

© Kim Stoddart

Use what you can to collect water when rain comes

Even a thin layer of grass clippings can be used as a mulch

Check water levels by placing fingers in the soil beneath the surface or doing the heft test by picking up the pot and checking the weight

Mixed planting enables you to use a mixture of tall and ground hugging plants that can protect each other as they grow. Just ensure that sun-loving specimens aren't too shaded out.

Water butts at the ready

Of course with the really dry spring we now face the risk of flash flooding if we get a period of heavy rain. The ground is dry which means water won't be so easily able to soak away and this is how surface water can quickly build and cause flooding. However, just making sure you have some water storage capacity will help to slow the flow. Emptying water butts so they are ready to fill up is useful, but ultimately even old bins placed outside, or attached to downpipes, all have a valuable role to play.

© Kim Stoddart

Allow layered planting and ground cover to help protect the soil and keep moisture in

Don't cut back grass or plants too much

Now, I know I've said I was cutting some of the dandelions, but I'm still keeping grass longer as it offers more protection against drying than cropped turf. Lawns cut very short are super vulnerable to periods of drought, so mowing on a higher cut can help afford valuable protection over the weeks ahead.

Protecting seedlings

We've talked a lot in the magazine about the importance of finding the brand/s of peat-free compost that work best for you. During periods of heat some composts can more easily cap (develop a solid crust) on the surface so measures such as putting your finger in the soil to check if more watering is needed (or not) will help ensure plants receive the right amount of liquid refreshment.

When planting out, deep watering and the use of a mulch also helps massively, and if you can, it is best to plant out when the weather is a little cooler or earlier or later in the day.

Also consider successional seed sowing as much as you can within recommended time frames to help boost results overall.

How are you protecting your garden against drought?

Competition time

Share your ideas and images for a chance to win one of five copies of Kim's book *The Climate Change Resilient Vegetable Garden.*

The
CLIMATE CHANGE
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HOW TO GROW FOOD IN A CHANGING CLIMATE
KIM STODDART

The glorious gardens at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh are just one of our recommended gardens to visit

© Shutterstock

Sensational summer gardens to visit

Pick up some top tips and immerse yourself in beauty by paying a visit to gardens across the UK this summer. Here are a few suggestions from *AG*'s **Sue Bradley**

While reading about plants, growing techniques and design pointers in *Amateur Gardening* provides plenty of inspiration for our outside spaces, there's much to be said for going out and being immersed in the real thing.

With the weeks getting warmer and summer-blooming plants preparing to shine, there's no better time to explore some of the gorgeous gardens to be found throughout the UK and pick up hints, tips and ideas.

As well as providing plenty of inspiration, visiting these beautiful spaces in person can leave us feeling uplifted in the process.

Many gardens that open to the public seek to make their visitors especially welcome with cafés and restaurants offering refreshments and some even sell plants, or are happy to pass on information as to where to buy them, and provide invaluable advice on how they grow them. Before setting off, take a look at a garden's website for opening times, ticket details and what's on offer.

GARDENS FOR GOOD CAUSES

All manner of inspiration can be found within gardens open in aid of the National Garden Scheme, which raises money for health and horticultural charities. Take a look at the NGS website to find a feast of beautiful and thought-provoking locations to visit this summer: *www.ngs.org.uk*

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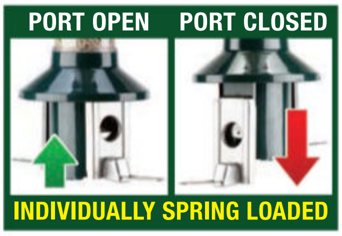

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Right plant, right place inspiration

Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens, Essex

From gravel and scree to water and woodland, the 7.5 acres of gardens created on a stretch of wasteland in Essex by the late horticultural pioneer Beth Chatto are a beautiful testament to her ecological principle of 'right plant, right place'.

Explore five distinct areas that demonstrate how working with nature can yield memorable results.

The Gravel Garden showcases drought-tolerant plants, the Scree Garden is a series of raised beds containing alpine plants, the Water Garden is a calming space full of rich foliage and rich colours, the Woodland Garden showcases shade lovers under a canopy of oaks and the Reservoir Garden is an open area full of late season interest.

And, for those who feel suitably inspired after taking a good look round, Beth Chatto's Plants nursery is conveniently situated on the same site.

■ Beth Chatto's Plants and Gardens, Clacton Road, Elmstead Market, Elmstead, near Colchester CO7 7DB *www.bethchatto.co.uk*

© Beth Chatto Gardens

Other gardens following the 'right plant, right place' principle include:

- Threave Garden and Nature Reserve, Dumfries and Galloway: home to the School of Heritage Gardening since 1960. Explore garden rooms showcasing different styles and planting in this wildlife-friendly space, cared for by National Trust Scotland. *www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/threave-garden*
- Woodpeckers in Woking, Surrey: a horticultural designer's own garden. *www.ngs.org.uk/gardens/woodpeckers-gu22/*

Top topiary

Levens Hall, Cumbria

The world's oldest topiary gardens can be found at Levens Hall. Designed by Monsieur Guillaume Beaumont and established from 1694, this unique collection of ancient box and yew trees in abstract or geometric shapes sits above colourful bedding plants.

The topiary is clipped towards the end of the season, a task that takes six months. Other features to enjoy include rose, fountain, vegetable and herb gardens, magnificent herbaceous borders, wildflowers meadows and a willow labyrinth.

■ Levens Hall, Kendal, Cumbria. *www.levenshall.co.uk/gardens*

© Levens Hall Val Corbett

Other examples of clever clipping:

- The Courts, Holt, in Wiltshire: an Arts and Crafts Garden laid out in a series of 'rooms', including a large lawn surrounded by hedges and topiary. *www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/the-courts-garden*
- Canons Ashby, near Daventry, Northamptonshire: a collection of topiary surrounding a Tudor manor house. *www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/leicestershire-northamptonshire/canons-ashby*
- Biddulph Grange, North Staffordshire: topiary found here include obelisks and a tunnel topped by a pyramid in The Egypt Court. The stumpery here is said to have inspired the one at King Charles' home at Highgrove. *www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/shropshire-staffordshire/biddulph-grange-garden/*
- Sandringham Estate, Norfolk: created in 2023, the geometric topiary garden is designed to provide a place of peace and contemplation and increase biodiversity. *www.sandringhamestate.co.uk*
- The Shamrock Garden at Mount Stewart, County Down, is noted for its topiary, including a harp and creatures from Irish mythology. *www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/northern-ireland/mount-stewart*

Daring design

The Newt in Somerset

There is much to see and experience at The Newt, the heart of which is a 21st century garden that builds on centuries of horticultural history.

Among its unforgettable features is The Parabola, a curved walled garden concealing an apple tree maze designed by Italian-French architect Patrice Taravella.

There's also a large rill, a reimagined Roman villa, a winter garden, an aerial walk called The Viper above the canopies of trees, a produce garden growing more than 350 different fruits and vegetables for the restaurant and farm shop, a grotto, The Beezantium, which provides an opportunity to peek into the fascinating lives of bees, and The Story of Gardening, an interactive modern museum that includes the opportunity to visit some of the world's most famous creations in virtual reality pods.

At the heart of The Newt is Hadspen, now a hotel but previously the home of the influential Hobhouse family and the origin of popular plants such as *Astrantia* 'Hadspen Blood' and the ornamental rhubarb 'Hadspen Crimson'.

■ **The Newt in Somerset, Bruton, BA7 7NG**
thenewtinsomerset.com

© The Newt

Other gardens with fabulous designs:

■ The Laskett near Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire: created Sir Roy Strong and his late wife, Julia Trevelyan Oman. In 2021 it was given to Perennial, the charity helping to build better futures for people in horticulture and their families. *www.perennial.org.uk*

■ Bridgemere Show Gardens, Cheshire: a six-acre site that's home to 16 individual gardens, eight of which won gold or silver medals at RHS Chelsea and Tatton Flower Shows and the RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival. From cottage and Victorian topiary gardens to a woodland walk, pond and waterfall, not to mention the Fryers Rose Garden, there's plenty to admire. *www.bridgemereshowgardens.co.uk*

■ Wollerton Old Hall, Shropshire: a formal, modern garden surrounding a 16th century hall, with richly planted 'rooms' bursting with design ideas. *www.wollertonoldhallgarden.com*

■ Barnsdale Gardens, Exton, Oakham, East Midlands, collection of individually designed gardens created by Geoff Hamilton and looked after AG's Nick. *www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk*

Prairie Planting

Knoll Gardens, Dorset

Grasses and perennials are combined to create long-lasting, wildlife-friendly and colourful spaces at Knoll Gardens in Dorset.

Neil Lucas has embraced the naturalistic style known as 'prairie planting' popularised by the Dutch designer Piet Oudolf and spent the past 30 years creating a stunning space next to his nursery specialising in ornamental grasses.

This garden seamlessly blends graceful grasses and striking perennials, with mature trees and shrubs providing structure and form, all bringing interest and diverse habitat throughout the seasons.

■ **Knoll Gardens, Wimborne, Dorset.**
www.knollgardens.co.uk

© Knoll Gardens

Other Prairie Planting wonders include:

■ The garden at the Hauser + Wirth Gallery in Bruton, Somerset: *www.hauserwirth.com/locations/10068-hauser-wirth-somerset/* and the glasshouse borders at RHS Wisley in Surrey, *www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley*, both designed by Piet Oudolf.

■ The Stables near Cheltenham: which opens for the National Gardens Scheme *www.ngs.org.uk/gardens/the-stables-gl51/*

■ Dove Cottage Nursery in Halifax, West Yorkshire: full of naturalistic, late-season colour from grasses and perennials. *https://mail.dovecottagenursery.co.uk/*

Tranquil countryside

Stockton Bury Gardens, Herefordshire

Praised for its inspiring design and unusual plants, the four-acre Stockton Bury Gardens is well worth seeking out for its beautiful vistas and relaxed atmosphere.

Wander around herbaceous borders, a Victorian kitchen garden, a glasshouse and a water garden, all against a backdrop of historic farm buildings that include a medieval pigeon house and tithe barn and cider apple orchards.

This romantic, family-run garden is a haven for those seeking beauty and peace and quiet. Make the most of a visit by booking onto a garden tour with gardener and *AG*'s former deputy editor Tamsin Westhorpe.

■ Stockton Bury, Kimbolton, Herefordshire. *www.stocktonbury.co.uk*

© Stockton Bury Gardens

Other tranquil countryside gardens to fill your heart with joy:

■ Cascades Gardens, near Matlock, Derbyshire: a series of garden rooms set on several levels, with cliff top paths providing spectacular panoramic views. Inspired by Japanese gardens and Buddhist philosophy, it's designed for relaxation and reflection. *cascadesgardens.com/garden/*

■ Haddon Hall, Bakewell, Derbyshire: gardens with atmosphere, from Elizabethan walled gardens, terraces that cascade down to the River Wye and areas that have been redesigned by Arne Maynard. *www.haddonhall.co.uk/gardens/*

■ Parcevall Hall Gardens, Wharfedale, Yorkshire: 24 acres of woodland gardens and wide terraces carved out of the hillside by William Milner during the 1930s, with wonderful views of the Yorkshire Dales. *www.parcevallhallgardens.co.uk*

All-weather visits

The Eden Project, Cornwall

The Rainforest Biome and Mediterranean Biome at The Eden Project are a feast for the senses with the additional benefit of being undercover, which means they can be visited come rain or shine.
Trek through the humid tropics in the Rainforest Biome and enjoy stunning views from the accessible canopy walkway, while sights, scents and stories from the Mediterranean, California, South Africa and Western Australia can be found in the Mediterranean Biome, home to more than 1,000 varieties of plants.

The Eden Project, created within a former clay mine, aims to demonstrate and inspire positive action for the planet and is a unique combination of architecture and biological engineering. It has vast outdoor gardens providing inspiration for colourful seasonal borders, art installations and play areas as well as its famous biomes.

Be mindful of the weather when visiting the biomes, which can get very hot on warm days; sunscreen is recommended.

■ Eden Project, Bodelva, Cornwall. PL24 2SG

© The Eden Project

Other all-weather gardens:

■ RHS Wisley in Woking: contains The Glasshouse, a cathedral-like structure covering the area of 10 tennis courts that's packed with tender plants. *www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley.*

■ Kew Gardens is home to The Princess of Wales Conservatory, a series of fascinating eco systems within 10 computer-controlled climate zones. *www.kew.org/kew-gardens*

Wildlife-friendly

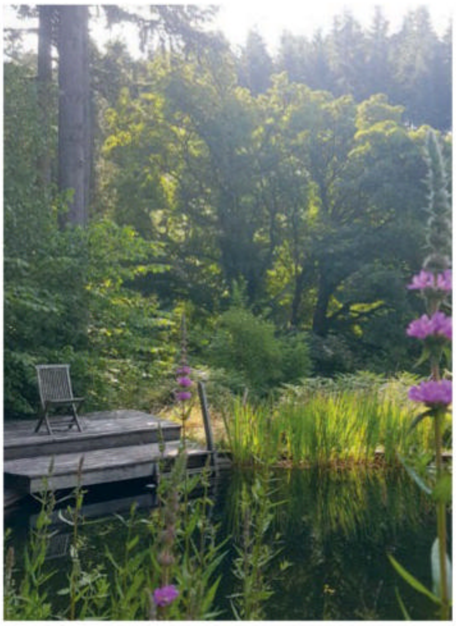
Nant-y-Bedd, Monmouthshire

Gardening some 1,200 feet above sea level in the Black Mountains of Wales isn't for the faint-hearted, but this hasn't stopped Sue and Ian Mabberley creating Nant-y-Bedd over the past 40 years.

This 10-acre organic garden extends uphill into forest and slopes gently downwards to the Grwyne Fawr River, a Special Area of Conservation for salmon and otter, and boasts a natural swimming pool reached by a rope bridge, a treehouse, an edible forest garden and a cottage garden.

Sustainable gardening practices are followed, including using homemade compost and seed saving. Nant-y-Bedd was named the RHS Partner Garden of the Year in 2022.

- **Nant-y-Bedd near Abergavenny.** ***www.Nantybedd.com***



© Nant-y-Bedd Sue Mabberley

Find more wildlife-friendly inspiration:

- Knepp Estate near Horsham, West Sussex: pioneer of rewilding. *www.knepp.co.uk*
- Brantwood, near Coniston Water, Cumbria: eight unique gardens that continue radical experiments in land management and horticulture begun by the Victorian John Ruskin and his cousin Joan Severn. Home to the National Plant Collection of Wisteria and 'Hortus Inclusus' in honour of Ruskin's book. *www.brantwood.org.uk*
- Dalemain in Penrith, Cumbria: contains more than 200 old-fashioned roses and a wild garden drawing on the work of William Robinson. *www.dalemain.com*
- Green Island Gardens, Essex: a 20-acre woodland garden transformed into a wildlife haven. The RHS Partner Garden for 2024 and National Collections of Hamamelis and Camellia. *www.greenislandgardens.co.uk/*

Organic garden

The Organic Garden at Yeo Valley, nr Bristol

This ornamental garden creatively combines bold planting and whimsical elements, all managed organically. Highlights include The Avenue, planted with tea crab apples *Malus huphensis*, along with a perennial meadow, a gravel garden, an ornamental vegetable garden, a silver birch glade and a pond. A date for the diary is the Yeo Valley Organic Garden Festival 2025, held September 18 to 20.

- **The Organic Garden at Yeo Valley, Blagdon, near Bristol.** ***www.yeovalley.co.uk/the-organic-garden***

Other gardens to find out more about organic growing:

- Ryton Gardens in Warwickshire: demonstration garden for Garden Organic. *www.gardenorganic.org.uk/get-involved/visit-our-garden*
- Helmsley Walled Garden, north Yorkshire: historic walled garden cared for by volunteers. It has ornamental borders, fruit and vegetables, including 52 Yorkshire apple varieties. Seasonal workshops. *www.helmsleywalledgarden.org.uk*

© The Organic Garden at Yeo Valley Britt Willoughby

© Wakehurst

Plant collections

Wakehurst, Sussex

We've all heard of Kew Gardens, but equally worth a visit is its sister site just over 50 miles away.

Wakehurst, described as 'Kew's wild botanic garden in Sussex', has an extraordinary living collection of exotic trees and woodland plants on more than 500 acres.

Arranged according to the continent from which they originate, they're planted to a 'woodland principle' and contribute to a series of diverse landscapes. Together they form a 'Woodlands of the World' walk.

Wakehurst has a collection of rhododendrons that holds global conservation status, and its internationally significant examples of *Nothofagus spp* can be seen in its Southern Hemisphere collections. It is also home to the Millennium Seed Bank and the National Collection of Betula (birch).

■ **Wakehurst Place, Ardingly, Haywards Heath, Sussex RH17 6TN.** ***www.kew.org/wakehurst***

Other plant collections well worth exploring:

- Lullingstone Castle & the World Garden in Kent: created by modern day plant hunter Tom Hart Dyke. www.lullingstonecastle.co.uk
- Birmingham Botanical Gardens: historic botanic gardens that have remained intact since 1829. *www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk*
- Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh: four gardens containing one of the world's richest plant collections. *www.rbge.org.uk*
- The National Botanic Garden of Wales: contains more than 5,000 different plants and manages the Waun Las National Nature Reserve. *www.botanicgarden.wales*
- Borde Hill, Sussex: boasts one of the largest collections of privately owned champion trees (selected trees deemed special because of their height, size or significance.) gathered by plant hunters, along with a nationally important English country garden with magnificent views over Grade II*-listed parkland. *www.bordehill.co.uk*
- Doddington Hall & Gardens, near Lincoln: renowned for its collection of irises and 'Doddington System' of splitting rhizomes once flowering has finished during June. Selected rhizomes are sold on site in the farm shop. *www.doddingtonhall.com/hall-and-gardens*

Write in Which gardens fill you with inspiration? Write in with a photo or email **editor@amateurgardening.com** and tell us why *AG* readers should visit.

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The Latin name for pinks is *Dianthus*, which means 'flower of the gods'

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How to grow delightful dianthus

Mike Palmer shares his top tips for growing picture-perfect pinks

> *"The fairest flowers o' th' season are our carnations and streaked gillyvors…"*
> *Shakespeare – The Winter's Tale*

There's something quite special about the Dianthus family, which includes sweet williams, carnations and pinks. I'm not alone in my admiration as that Shakespeare chappie was quite taken with gillyflowers, or 'gillyvors', as they were also known back then. In fact, their Latin genus name *Dianthus* derives from the Greek words 'dios' (god) and 'anthos' (flower), meaning 'divine flower', or 'flower of the gods'

Dianthus has a fascinating history dating back thousands of years (yes, before I was even thought of), full of symbolism and mythology. Luckily for us, it's no myth that these beautiful, hardy plants are easy to look after, extremely versatile, will pull in pollinators, and, the love keeps on coming, many are also exquisitely scented.

Hailing largely from the sunny, free-draining climes of Europe and Asia with a few species found in North Africa, dianthus includes border carnations, (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), sweet william (*Dianthus barbatus*) and Chinese and Cheddar pinks (*Dianthus chinensis* and *D. gratianopolitanus*). And, lucky us, we're spoiled for choice with approximately 300 species and hundreds of cultivars and hybrids to choose from.

Blooming from June until September, their pretty flowers gravitate around the pink, red, purple and white end of the spectrum, with single and double-bloomed varieties. It's thought their common name 'pinks' derived originally not from their colour, but from the flowers' delicate, frilly, serrated edges, resembling fabric that's been cut with pinking shears.

How to use pinks in the garden

From diminutive dianthus at just 30cm (12in) to taller specimens at 80cm (31.5in), pinks can be used in alpine planting, pots, gravel gardens and borders, either as a delightfully scented edging plant on a well-trodden pathway, or nestled among other sun-loving perennials.

Left: Many pinks are a shade of pink though their name derives from their petals' 'pinked' edges

All images unless otherwise credited: Mike Palmer

Mike's Perfect Pink Picks

© Shutterstock

Above: Mike crams sweet williams into pots and borders, deadheading them regularly to keep their eye-catching blooms coming

Sweet williams

Everyone's favourites, sweet williams are short-lived perennials or biennials typically growing to 30-60cm (12-24in), providing their unique joy for two to three years.

For the greatest choice, sow seeds in mid to late-summer or, like me, head to your local garden centre in autumn and buy garden-ready sweet williams which will produce an abundance of deliciously scented blooms the following late spring through to early summer.

Pinks & carnations

© Crocus

Above: 'Mrs Sinkins' is a cool pure white variety

Dianthus 'Mrs Sinkins'

I'd be pulled in front of the horticultural magistrates if I neglected to mention the dianthus doyenne 'Mrs Sinkins' with her serrated, pure white flowers and powerful scent. Like all dianthus, she will luxuriate in a cottage garden planting. (H&S: 30cm/12in).

Above: *Dianthus* 'Carnelia Pink & Proud'

Dianthus 'Carnelia Pink & Proud'

This is an eruption of semi-double blooms in shades of pinks and white, floating atop a tidy mound of linear, glaucous foliage. Plant in pots or alongside a pathway to fully appreciate its sweet-smelling flowers (H:20cm/8in, S:25cm/10in).

Above: Velvety, dark-red blooms of *Dianthus* 'Passion'

Dianthus 'Passion'

At my age I perk up pronto if the word passion is thrown into conversation, and *Dianthus* 'Passion' will have you swooning with sumptuous sprays of velvety, dark-red flowers held aloft on grey-green foliage. Like all dianthus, once established it's drought-tolerant and perfect for cutting and bringing inside. (H&S: 30cm/12in).

Above: Beautifully scented *Dianthus* 'Tickled Pink'

Dianthus 'Tickled Pink'

My next selection is sure to tickle your fancy; it's the neon pink, beautifully scented *Dianthus* 'Tickled Pink' which flowers from late spring to summer, as with my previous favourites (H&S: 30cm/12in).

© Shutterstock

Above: The dainty raspberry-fringed flowers of *Dianthus* 'Gran's Favourite'

Dianthus 'Gran's Favourite'

Imagine me with little round glasses perched on the end of my nose, grey hair pulled into a bun and a pink knitted blanket draped over my knees, as my next choice is *Dianthus* 'Gran's Favourite'. I'm definitely on Team Granny as it's a delightful dianthus with double white petals each painted at their centres and fringed with raspberry markings (H&S: 40cm/15.7in).

© Shutterstock

Above: This lovely rose-pink perennial grows well in containers, rock gardens or gravel

Dianthus gratianopolitanus

The somewhat simple flowers of UK native, *Dianthus gratianopolitanus*, or Cheddar pink, still pack a punch in my opinion. This rose-pink perennial loves a sunny, dry and open position so is perfectly suited to a container, gravel or rock garden, preferring a limestone soil (H&S: 10 to 50cm/4 to 20in).

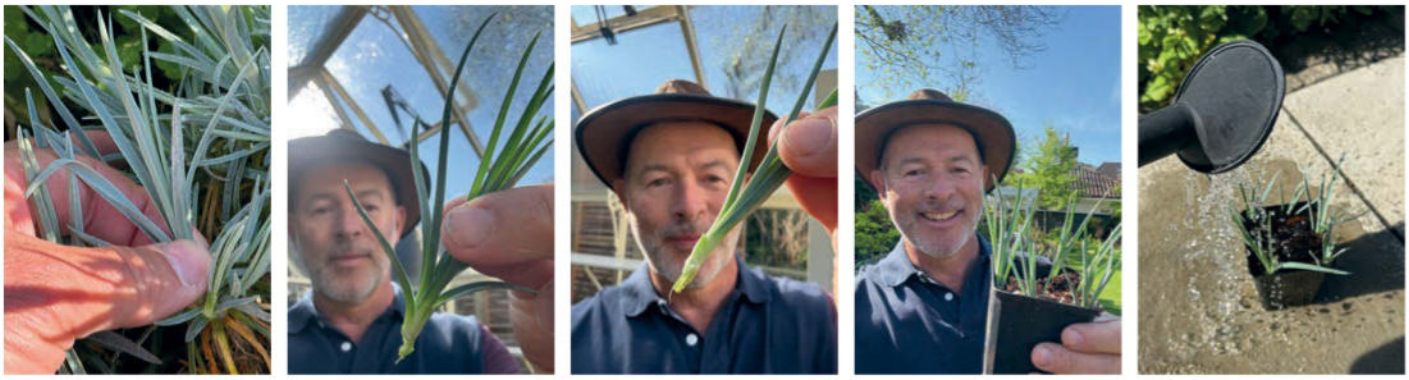
© Shutterstock

Above: Heavily scented joyful blooms of *Dianthus plumarius* 'Dixie Red Rose Bicolor'

Dianthus plumarius 'Dixie Red Rose Bicolor'

Simplistic in its beauty, *Dianthus plumarius* 'Dixie Red Rose Bicolor' turns heads with its heavily scented, upturned, pastel pink and red single flowers. It's perfect on the edge of a pathway, sitting alongside the sparking, daisy-like flowers of *Erigeron karvinskianus*, or nestling closely alongside silver-leaved lavenders.

Easy peasy cost-free
pretty pinks



How to propagate more pinks for free

If you adore pinks as much as I do, then you'll be delighted to hear that propagating them is straight forward and reliable. The cuttings, or pipings, as they're known, are best taken from late spring to mid-summer.

Simply pull a non-flowering side shoot from the plant between thumb and forefinger and remove the lower leaves. I'm greedy, so I take a few cuttings in case some fail.

Plunge the cuttings into a small pot containing a 50/50 mix of peat-free multi-purpose compost and grit and water well, putting the cuttings somewhere warm and bright, but not in direct sunshine. Ensure the compost is kept slightly moist at all times, increasing watering when the cuttings show signs of growth in a few weeks' time.

When roots appear from the base of the pot it's time to gently knock the cuttings out and rehome them in their own slightly bigger pot with a gritty compost mix. Cuttings taken earlier in the season will develop healthy root systems and can be planted out before the end of the season.

Pests & diseases

As with many of our lovely garden plants, dianthus may be at the mercy of aphids, spider mites and rust, amongst other things, but I've always found them to be extremely trouble-free plants. Giving plants the conditions they'll thrive in will always make them more resilient, but there are, sadly, no guarantees.

I check foliage regularly, especially the undersides, where pests seek shelter from predators and the prevailing weather conditions, to identify any early tell-tale signs, which allows me to take preventative action immediately, allowing them to flower their very pretty (pink) socks off.

MIke loves his pinks and propagating plants

Pretty in pink - and with a scrumptious scent too

And finally...

Pinks have been described by some as being 'old-fashioned' plants, but I'm on a secret mission to bring these charming dianthus plants back into the forefront of our fast-paced digital world. Are you with me? Of course you are!

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■ Pink-edged, soft-cream pointed buds open to reveal a yellow glow at their base highlighting the yellow stamens at their heart. When fully open, the frilly petals darken to a deeper pink. Flowers are produced singly or in clusters. Excellent disease resistance, the foliage is warm red when new, maturing to dark green.

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THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing *AG* columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**

Fantastic fennel, tasty nasturtium and lemon verbena cordial

Anne explains how to grow herbs and flowers for food, decorations and thirst-quenching summer drinks

Anne sows and grows fennel in her sunny Devon garden

Inset image ©Shutterstock

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) brings us some fabulous aniseed flavours for a range of dishes, and also two different versions of one plant.

Easy-to-grow common or herb fennel is a tall perennial whose feathery leaves, flowers and seeds are used as flavourings. Many's the time I've been working near a fennel plant and snacked on the tasty yellow flowers. They are surprisingly satisfying and fennel seeds have long been eaten to stave off pangs of hunger.

Florence fennel (*F.v.*var *azoricum*) is similar but different, in that it is grown as an annual for the succulent swollen leaf bases that give it the name 'bulb fennel'. These develop above ground and make good eating, whether fresh in salads or baked until soft and almost caramelised.

Florence fennel is a crop that craves warmth and sunshine, but though I struggle to grow fat 'bulbs' in our kitchen garden, even slim ones are most welcome and reliable and fun to grow.

The beauty of edible flowers

Edible flowers look pretty scattered over salads, pizzas and pasta dishes, but while those of fennel are tasty, others please the eye more than the palate. There does not seem much flavour in a primrose or borage flower but large, colourful nasturtium blooms pack a peppery punch and their leaves are tasty too.

Home-made elderflower cordial

©Shutterstock

Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) are easy to grow from large seeds and develop quickly. Sown now, as spring merges with summer, they will bloom from late summer into autumn. Although I've added both flowers and leaves to salads, I have never made tea from nasturtiums and would love to give them a go.

Although I generally score well with a variety of garden teas, I have not been as adventurous with non-alcoholic cordials and mocktails. My fall back is usually a jug of elderflower cordial with ice, lemon, mint and cucumber, but what about rhubarb and raspberry? I'm eyeing up a plant of lemon verbena in need of a good pruning and might try making a syrup from its leaves.

How to grow… Florence fennel

The problem with growing decent-sized fennel 'bulbs' in our climate lies in giving the plants enough growing time (three to four months) in perfect conditions. They enjoy a steady warmth and moist soil with 30cm (12in) between plants, so they don't compete for root space and water.

Plants dislike root disturbance and are best sown directly, but can be started in modules under cover for planting out. These capricious Mediterranean plants will bolt (run up to seed) if sown too early or they experience erratic temperatures or droughts. For earlier sowings, choose cultivars described as bolt resistant such as 'Finale' or 'Dragon', or sow in early summer when steady warmth is more guaranteed.

Fortunately, fennel is so versatile that even if plants do bolt or produce mean 'bulbs', the leaves, flowers, seeds and bases are all edible.

Florence fennel needs three to four warm months to grow well

All images unless otherwise credited: John Swithinbank

Step by step Direct sowing Florence fennel

Soak the drill

Sow several seeds per station 12 inches (30cm) apart

Cover and pat down

My method is to rake a bed of good soil smooth and take out a drill. Soak this well if the soil is dry. Sow a few seeds at 30cm (12in) stations, cover over by their own size depth of soil and after germination, thin to one per station for growing on.

Water during dry spells and when they are ready, harvest by cutting just above soil level. The base will respond by making tasty sproutings.

For a larger quantity of smaller 'bulbs', trickle seeds thinly and evenly along your soaked drill and thin to 13cm (5in) or so.

There are usually plenty of seeds in a packet, so experimenting with several sowings using different methods and timings will reveal which suits your soil and climate best. They will grow if planted perhaps five to a 30cm (12in) wide pot.

Try these... colourful nasturtiums

Arizona Mix
Instead of round-edged petals, these are slightly indented and arranged to create a starry appearance. Expect plenty of orange, yellow or red flowers on vigorous trailing plants. www.mr-fothergills.co.uk

'Troika Yellow'
The eye-catching blooms of this trailing nasturtium are the creamy yellow of banana milkshake and each petal has a contrasting rich maroon blotch towards the base. Foliage is gently marbled. Plants can reach 20cm (10in) high and a spread of 1m (3ft) or more on good soil. www.thompson-morgan.com

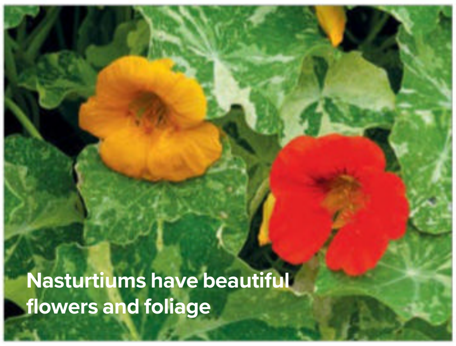
'Gleam Salmon'
Some single, some double, the blooms of this creeping nasturtium are a creamy peach delicately flushed with apricot and blotched with crimson near the centre. Plants can trail to 1.5m (5ft). www.chilternseeds.co.uk

Tasty nasturtiums

Originally from Peru and Bolivia, nasturtiums are spectacular annuals. Some remain compact but others climb, trail or swarm over beds and pathways. One of the best shows of nasturtiums can be seen on a summer visit to Monet's Gardens at Giverny, where they sprawl outwards from parallel beds either side of a pathway. By late summer there is a carpet of bright green foliage lit by long-spurred bright red, orange and yellow flowers.

Buy a trailing mix to create a similar effect. Some nasturtiums, such as trailing Arizona Mix and compact, bushy Alaska Mixed have marbled foliage.

Although nasturtiums grow readily from their large seeds and could be directly sown, I prefer to start mine in modules or fibre pots in a greenhouse, cold frame or on the patio. Before they become root bound, they are easy to place exactly where you want them.


Nasturtiums have beautiful flowers and foliage

Alternatively, sow into the top of a pot at least 45cm (18in) diameter, setting the seeds 13cm (5in) apart.

For maximum flowers, choose a sunny position and avoid rich soils as too much fertility will encourage leafy growth at the expense of blooms. Water in thoroughly.

Nasturtiums used to be notorious for attracting blackfly and were even recommended as decoys to lure them away from other plants such as beans. Yet if you've avoided spraying and encouraged lots of birds and natural predators and parasites, these sap-sucking insects should not be a problem.

How to make home-made lemon verbena cordial

Pruning and handling my lemon verbena released a cloud of delicious sherbet lemon scent. Longer shoots were selected as cuttings and the rest stripped of leaves. Making anything is 90% prep, so I had standing by a funnel and jar steeping in sterilising solution and some freshly boiled muslin.

Making the syrup is easy, by gently heating a cup of sugar in a cup of water before adding half a cup of leaves and letting it all simmer for 10 minutes. After cooling, the liquid is strained into the well-rinsed jar and should keep for a month in the fridge.

Diluted with water, the flavour was not as strong as I'd hoped, probably because the leaves were small and old. After sprouting, repotting and placing in full sun the plant should grow better quality leaves and I'll try again with a larger quantity.

Above: Have a go at making a refreshing cordial with lemon verbena leaves

©Shutterstock

Get ready for a summer of glorious blooms

© Shutterstock

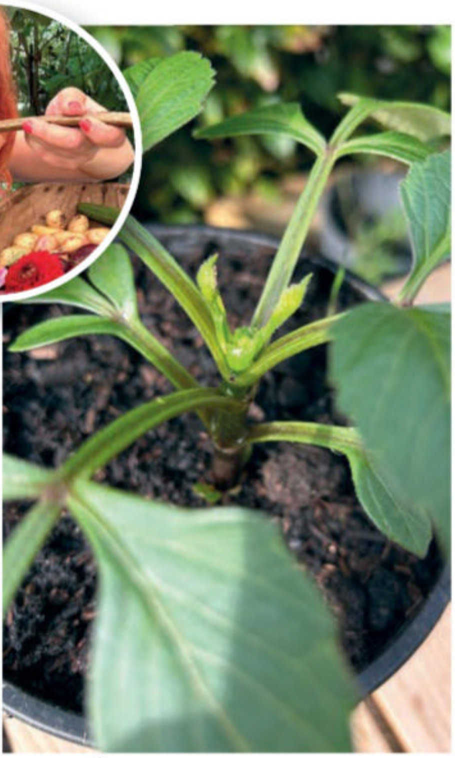
Natural pest control and pinching out

Dahlia expert **Kim O'Brien** explains how to boost blooms and help keep dahlias safe from damage

Now that the dahlias are lush with new growth, you may be considering 'pinching out' to promote bushier plants with hopefully more buds.

A rule of thumb is to count two or three pairs of leaves up from the base and then pinch out (remove) the growth above that. This might seem drastic, but it gives the plant more stability on which new top growth can branch and build, and side shoots are usually waiting in the wings to grow as soon as that central stem is removed.

The result of pinching out is that instead of a single leggy flower, you will now be rewarded with multiple blooms. It's a 'cruel to be kind' scenario, so take a deep breath, be brave, and pinch!



Freshly pinched dahlia with sideshoots waiting in the wings

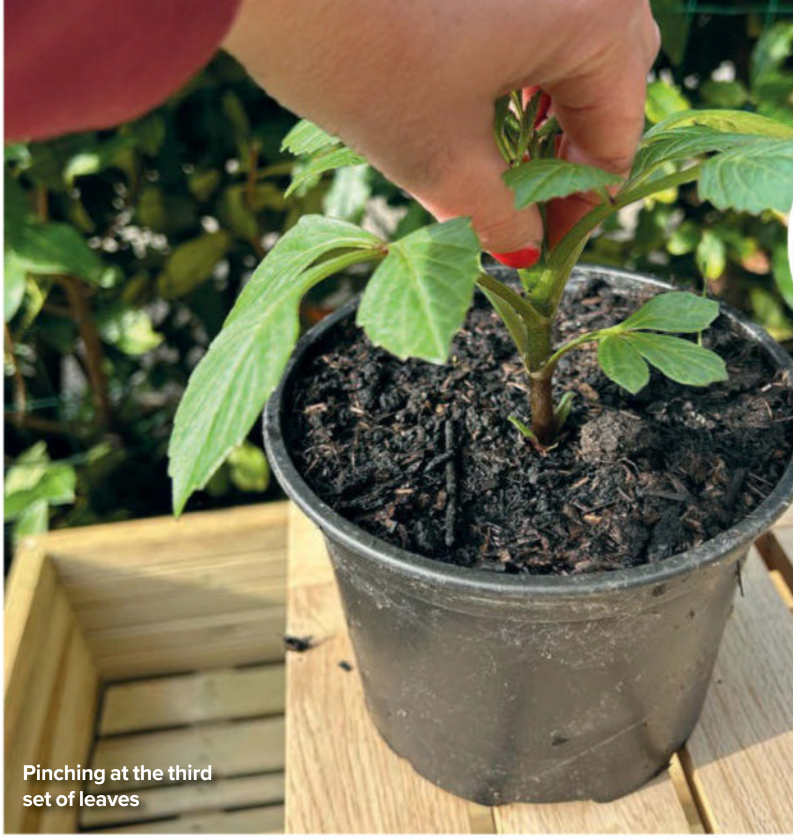
Pinched out material can be rooted to make new plants

Protecting dahlias and pondering natural pinching out

The emergence of this lush new foliage heralds the inevitable reappearance of the snails and slugs who love to feast upon it, so you might need a few defensive tactics to protect your dahlias from attack.

There are dozens of well-documented methods that you've probably already tried including beer traps, crushed egg shells, nematodes and copper tape. But I'll add a few more lesser-known slug control ideas to the mix.

All images unless otherwise credited: Kim O'Brien


Pinching at the third set of leaves

Kim's show garden dahlias were eaten to almost nothing but grew back beautifully

Whichever method or combination of methods you choose, it's important that it's natural, safe and eco-friendly. Slug pellets, even so-called 'organic' pellets, can negatively impact the environment, the food chain and the health of the hedgehogs, frogs, birds (and potentially cats) that eat them, so it's better to avoid these altogether.

When my showcase garden dahlias were eaten to stalks overnight it seemed devastating, but, incredibly, the plants grew back, stronger and healthier than before. I wonder if slugs and snails are always the 'pests' or terrible foe we imagine they are, or if they are simply nature's way of 'pinching out', making our dahlias grow stronger, healthier and more floriferous? Food for thought anyway.

New methods of slug control

Avoid slug and snail damage using natural methods

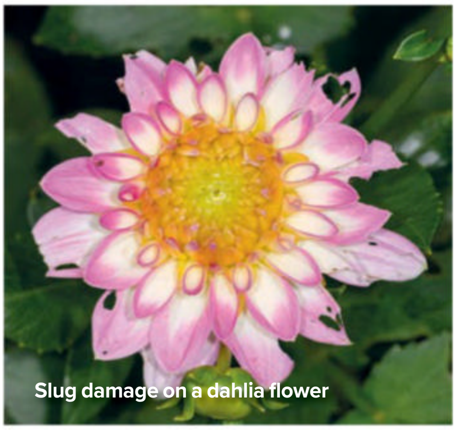
If you still feel that some level of slug and snail control may be necessary, here are my top tips for limiting their damage in an eco-friendly way:

Raw sheepswool creates an effective barrier against slugs

Sheep's wool contains lanolin, an excellent natural barrier which repels slugs when placed at the base of dahlias. Scattering bird food on flower beds where dahlias grow encourages birds, which naturally predate slugs to feast on them while feeding on the food you have generously provided.

Pouring a bubbling paste of yeast and sugar water onto bread and scattering it on the ground can attract slugs that will feast on the bread. This slug-covered food can then be gathered up and relocated. Using sacrificial salad or rhubarb leaves and cucumber between plants works in the same way. Another easy method is collection by torchlight. It's very satisfying to spend five minutes each evening gathering slugs and relocating them.

A lazier but equally effective technique involves watering a rotting plank of wood and laying it in the border in the evening. In the morning, turn it over and collect the snails that have made a home underneath it.


Slug damage on a dahlia flower

© Shutterstock

Dazzling dahlia

'Taratahi Ruby' is a striking scarlet dahlia of waterlily form

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Rosie's resilient gardening

Two simple but sensational summer project ideas

Rosie Irving shows you how to design a comfy lounger and ingenious ice bowl

It will soon be time to put down our garden spades and trowels, relax and enjoy the beautiful flowers that are springing up all around us.

There is increasing evidence that exposure to plants and green space, particularly our gardens, is beneficial to both our mental and physical health. A Japanese study discovered that looking at plants not only reduced stress and sadness but also lowered blood pressure and muscle tension.

A great way to relax is to sit on your own home-made lounger looking at the latest edition of *Amateur Gardening* with a thirst-quenching sorbet or ice cream served in a delightful home-made flower ice bowl!

Rosie's gorgeous petal ice bowls

How to make flower petal ice bowls for ice cream

Here's how to seriously impress your friends by serving chilled desserts or ice cream in a pretty flower petal ice bowl.

How to make it

- All you need are two differently sized freezer-safe bowls, water and a handful of stones or gravel.
- Pick white or brightly coloured flower heads and petals of different sizes (without the stems) and place in the larger bowl, pour water over the petals and place the smaller bowl in the centre of the large bowl on top of the water.
- Weigh the smaller bowl down with a few (cleaned) stones or gravel and place in the freezer for a few hours.
- The smaller bowl should come out without a struggle. Turn the larger bowl upside down in the sink and run water over the base for a short time to release it from the bowl. Cold water will suffice. Place it back in the freezer until you're ready to serve the dessert, using a tea towel to remove it from the freezer to avoid fingers getting stuck to the bowl!

Rosie shows you how to make a petalled ice bowl

Two freezer-safe bowls, pretty flowers and water are all you need to make an attractive ice bowl

All images unless otherwise credited: Rosie Irving

How to make a super simple low level pallet lounger

What you'll need

- 12 x 2.5cm (1in) screws
- 6 x 2cm (3/4in) screws
- 3 x butt hinges
- 2 pallets (ideally identical or very similar in width)
- 1 extra piece of pallet wood approximately 80cm/31.5in long x 9cm/3.5in wide
- Sharp-bladed handsaw
- Screwdriver or impact driver

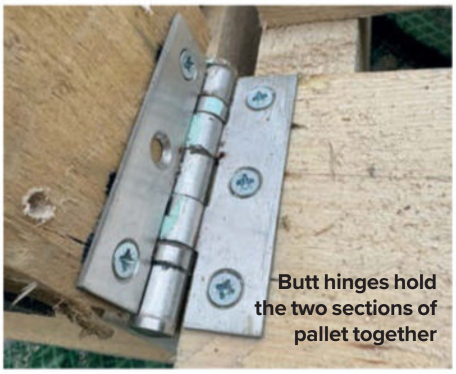
It's important that we make enough time to be outside relaxing as well as gardening and here is a way to create a satisfying and thrifty lounger made from our old friends, pallets!

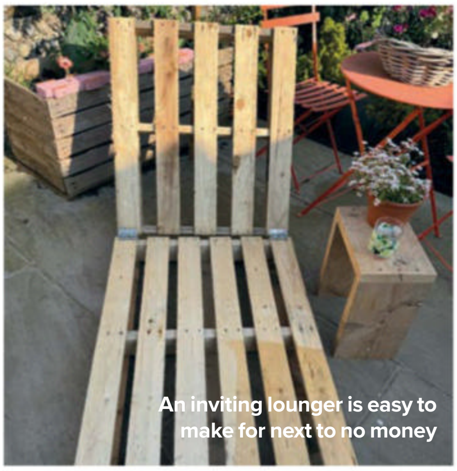
How to make it

- While not essential, it's better visually to use two identical pallets if you can.
- One will be used for the back support, the other for the base. A good height for the back support is 80cm (31.5in) so you'll probably need to remove part of the pallet as I've done here using a sharp-bladed hand saw.
- Join the back support to the base using two of the hinges as per the pictures below.
- The last thing to do is add a piece of wood to the back support as per the picture. This enables you to adjust the angle so you are comfortable.
- Add cushions, one of my reclaimed wood side tables to place your drink and flower ice bowl on, and then treat yourself to a guilt-free lounging session with your favourite gardening magazine and, for a few magical moments, all will be well with the world!

Using pallets to make a comfortable wooden garden lounger

Join the back support to the base using butt hinges


Butt hinges hold the two sections of pallet together


An inviting lounger is easy to make for next to no money

Add a couple of comfy cushions, then sit back and relax

You can follow more of Rosie's thrifty adventures on instagram **@rosieposieirving**

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9 of the best peaceful plants

Liz Zorab provides inspiration for the creation of a calming garden space

White blooms add a sense of peace to a garden.

© Shutterstock

I have always wanted a white garden, a sanctuary of calm and quiet where I can sit and escape the busy thoughts of work or the hectic need to get the next task completed at home or in the garden.

The reality is that I'm not sufficiently disciplined to have an all-white garden and anyway, most of us do not have the space to dedicate a large area to just one colour. So instead, I group a few plants with pale flowers together and let my imagination do the rest!

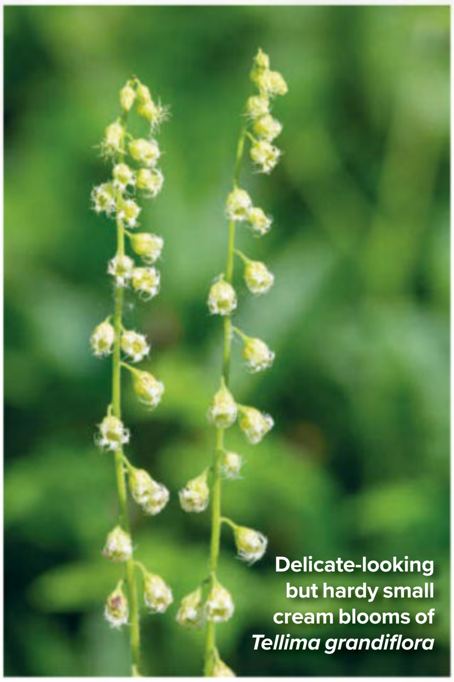
Plants with pale foliage, especially silvery leaves, also help to create a sense of peace, while white, cream and the palest of pastel-coloured flowers add to the feeling of contentment and calm.

Tellima grandiflora

Here's an interesting herbaceous perennial for a shady spot, although it's equally happy in partial shade and even full sun. Grow in a moist but free-draining soil in a sheltered position on a north or south-facing site. Avoid growing in clay soils as it may fail.

Tellima grandiflora forms a neat clump of leaves with racemes of very small, cream flowers held above the foliage. It flowers late spring to early summer. Height 75cm (29.5in). I've seen these growing happily under tall maple trees and at the top of banks above a small stream.

It is another of those plants that look delicate but are surprisingly tough. They are hardy throughout the UK and Ireland, even during harsh winters.



Delicate-looking but hardy small cream blooms of *Tellima grandiflora*

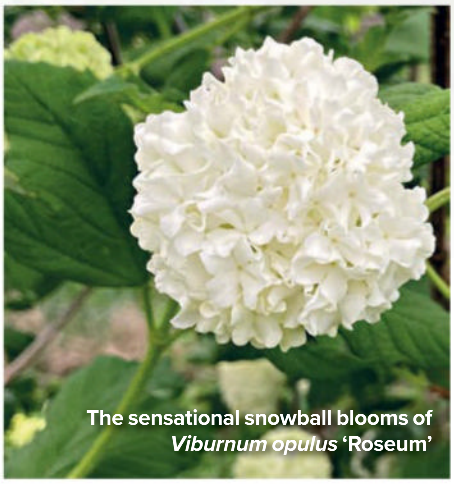
© Shutterstock

Viburnum opulus 'Roseum'

The snowball tree is a fast-growing, deciduous plant that grows to 3m to 5m (10ft to 16.5ft) height and spread.

An unfussy and hardy plant that will thrive in most situations, as long as you avoid waterlogged soil or full shade, it should grow well. In May, ball-like clusters of flowers appear, green at first and maturing to white, occasionally with a pink tint as the flowers age.

They make good cut flowers, and if you sear the stems they may last two weeks in the vase. The flowers are sterile, so no berries are produced.

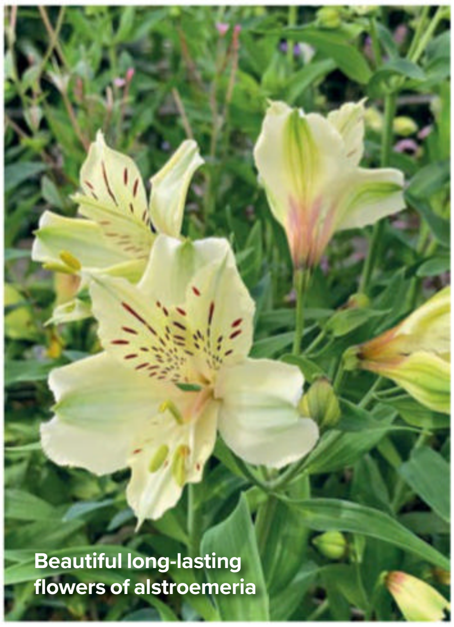


The sensational snowball blooms of *Viburnum opulus* 'Roseum'

Alstroemeria

Long-lasting as cut flowers, alstroemeria also works hard in the garden, providing colour for weeks on end through the summer.

For your pale-themed garden, try varieties like 'Summer Ice' or 'Summer Sky'. The Summer Series of alstroemerias



Beautiful long-lasting flowers of alstroemeria

All images unless otherwise credited: Liz Zorab

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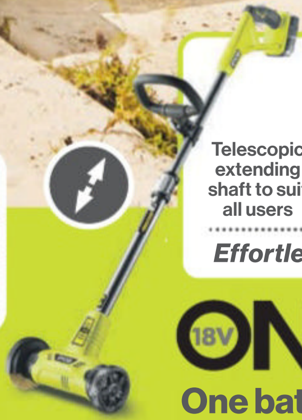

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Ideal for a calming garden, the soothing blooms of *Nicotiana alata* 'Lime Green'

The distinctive happy heart-shaped flowers of *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* 'Alba'

grow to 60cm or 70cm (24in to 27.5in) height and up to 50cm (19.6in) spread.

Grow in full sun or partial shade in a sheltered spot. Although it is hardy throughout most of the UK and Ireland, it will struggle to grow in clay soils and north-facing sites. Propagate by division in autumn or very early spring.

Nicotiana alata 'Lime Green'

I don't often include annuals in my planting suggestions, but for a calming, cool garden area, I think *Nicotiana alata* 'Lime Green' is worth considering. It is easy to grow from seed, or simply purchase some plug plants or seedlings. This is not tolerant of frost, so do not plant out until after the last frost date. Grow in a sheltered spot, in full sun or partial shade. It tolerates any soil, except clay. The plants have an upright habit and grow to 60cm height.

Hesperantha coccinea f. *alba*

This is the white form of the crimson flag lily. It's a clump-forming plant that produces flowers in late summer through to autumn.

The stems hold the flowers above the foliage, with 10 or more flowers per stem, and the white petals are often tinged with pale pink. Grow in full sun, in any type of soil that is moist, and in a sheltered spot to protect from drying winds.

It is hardy across most of the UK. In cooler areas provide protection during winter. Height 40cm (15.7in) and 60cm (2ft) spread.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis 'Alba'

Commonly known as white dicentra, or white bleeding heart, it is easily identifiable by the distinctive heart-shaped flowers. This herbaceous perennial flowers in late spring and early summer.

I find it a useful plant, with its crisp white flowers, because it dies back by late summer, leaving space for other plants to shine.

Lamprocapnos spectabilis 'Alba' will fail to thrive in acid or sandy soils and prefers partial shade in moist or poorly drained soil and a sheltered spot.

It grows to 1m (3.3ft) height and 60cm (2ft) spread.

Wonderful white late summer flowers of *Hesperantha coccinea* f. *alba*

Rosa 'Tranquility'

One of my favourite pale roses is *Rosa* 'Tranquility'. It has pink-blushed flower buds in clusters that open to creamy white flowers. It is repeat-flowering, so deadhead regularly to promote new flowers.

Height and spread 125cm (49.2in) so it is ideal to plant in the middle or back of the border. Although it is not fussy about soil types, grow in full sun for the best display.

Thalictrum Splendide White ('Fr21034')

I spotted this pretty thalictrum in a friend's garden and instantly liked it. The small,

Creamy, dreamy blooms of *Rosa* 'Tranquility'

Dainty and delightful *Thalictrum* Splendide White ('Fr21034')

white flowers are held aloft on tall flower stems up to 175cm (69in) height. Don't be fooled by the daintiness of the flowers, the plants are tough and hardy across all of the UK and Ireland, even during the most severe of winters.

They prefer to grow in partial shade on moist or poorly drained soil. Plant in an east or west-facing position and give them some shelter to prevent the tall stems breaking on windier days.

Pretty crisp white petals of Peony 'Avalanche'

Peony 'Avalanche'

The crisp white flowers of *Paeonia* 'Avalanche' start with a slight pink tinge and occasionally have a red streak on the edges. The petals form a shallow dome and the flowers are lightly scented.

It flowers late in the season and has a height and spread of 80cm (31.5in). It grows in full sun, in most soils, but will fail to thrive in constantly wet soil.

Plant so that the sprouting 'eyes' are no more than 2.5cm (1in) below the surface, otherwise your peony may fail to flower.

There are several white varieties of peony so if you select an early, a mid and a late-flowering variety, you can extend the period that you'll enjoy peonies in your garden.

Filipendula ulmaria

Add an edible

Meadowsweet grows into a dense clump of foliage. With a height and spread 100cm (3.3ft), it will fail to thrive on chalky or sandy soil, preferring moist, but well-drained or poorly drained soil. Grow in full sun or partial shade.

From June to September irregular clusters of highly fragrant, cream flowers appear. It is fully hardy and a native to the UK and Ireland. The buds, flowers and seeds are edible and taste of a combination of hay, almond and vanilla.

Highly fragrant edible flowers of Meadowsweet

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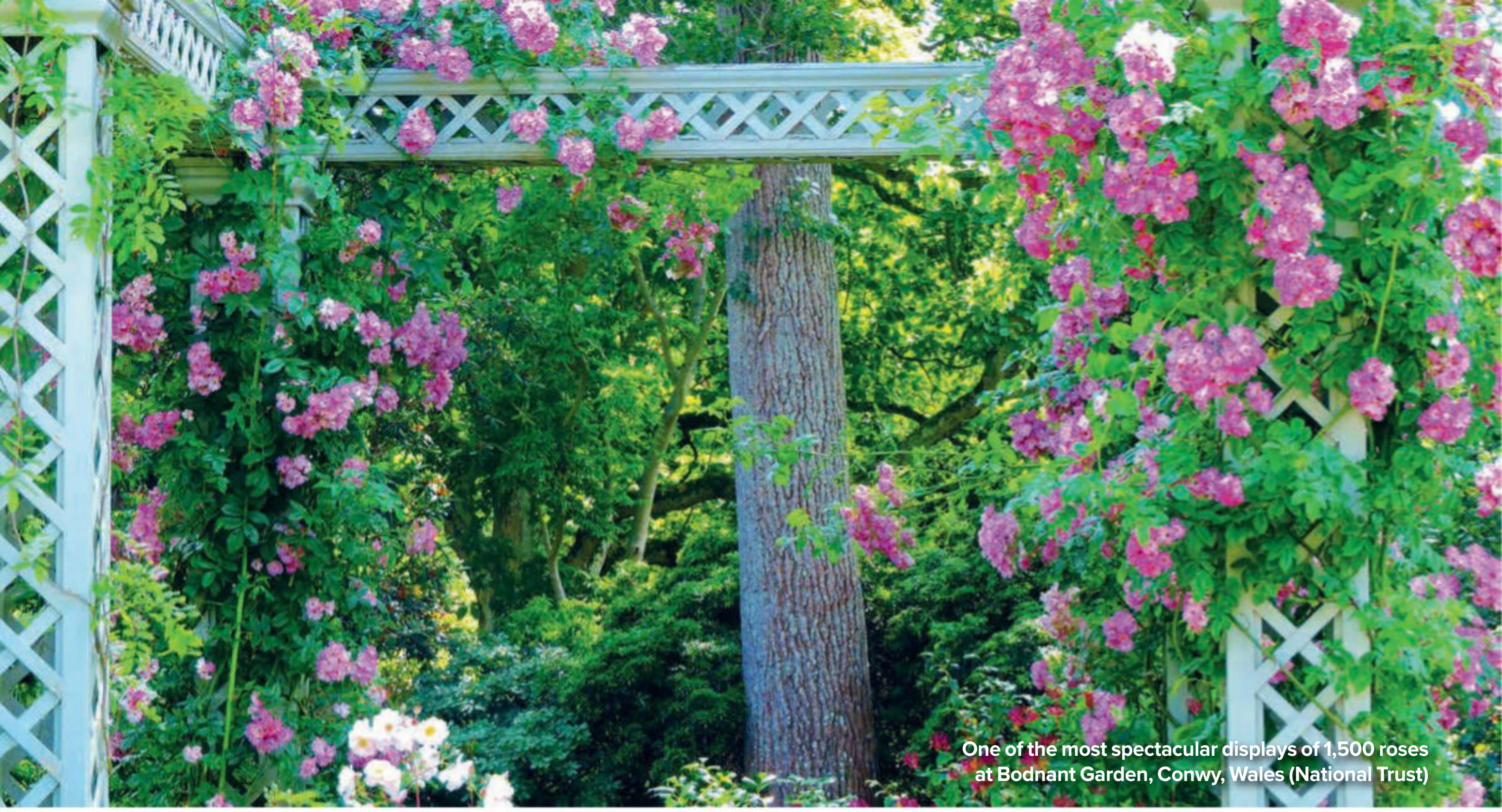


One of the most spectacular displays of 1,500 roses at Bodnant Garden, Conwy, Wales (National Trust)

7 of the most radiant rose gardens

Celebrate the nation's favourite plant with these Great British Gardens to visit this summer

Roses are considered the nation's favourite flower and the red rose is the national emblem of England, which has featured strongly throughout its history.

In Britain during June and July you can discover amazing displays of old-fashioned scented roses, rambling roses and modern roses in borders and along trellises, in thousands of our gardens: here are just some of the best.

Cerney House Gardens, Cotswolds

This secret Cotswold garden at Cerney House, high above the lovely Churn Valley, is a very special and friendly place.

There is an amazing sloping, historic walled garden where you will see masses of old-fashioned roses with companion plantings along the trellises and in the herbaceous borders.

Organic in approach, the plants tumble happily over each other and fill the air with perfume.

- **Dog friendly, partial disabled access, refreshments.**

Bodnant Garden, Conwy, Wales (National Trust)

The gardens are perched above the River Conwy with views across the valley to Snowdonia National Park.

Here you will find one of Britain's finest and most spectacular gardens with something to see in every season. The gardens have one of the finest displays of roses you will find, with a collection of more than 1,500 climbers, ramblers and shrub roses, displayed on the Italianate terraces.

- **Partial disabled access, restaurant.**

Mottisfont Abbey – Hampshire (National Trust)

This is one of the most famous rose gardens in Britain, set in the historic grounds of an historic abbey. It really is a must-visit place!

Set within a walled garden, fabulous scents from old-fashioned roses trail over walls, pergolas and arches. Other plants intermingle giving a fantastic picture of intense colours.

The roses are best from around the second week of June until the first week in July. Mottisfont can be very busy and is best avoided at weekends if possible.

- **Disabled access to gardens, restaurant, tea room.**

Old-fashioned charm at the amazing Cerney House Gardens, Cotswolds

All images © Great British Gardens

Breathtaking historic collection of roses at Carolside, Scottish Borders

Peter Beales Roses, Norfolk

If you love roses, then the three-acre rose gardens at Peter Beales Garden Centre are the perfect place to visit this summer.

Here you can soon lose yourself in the tranquil surroundings as you meander through the inspirational display garden with its intoxicating perfumes, rose-covered archways, walkways and stunning observation turret. There is also a separate wildlife garden.

There is a great selection of roses for sale.

- **Disabled access, dog friendly, restaurant, roses for sale.**

Lowther Castle, Cumbria

Internationally renowned garden designer Dan Pearson joined forces with 14 gardeners, dozens of volunteers and teams of groundworkers to create the stunning new Rose Garden at Lowther, planting 2000-plus rose bushes and hundreds of perennials.

The result is a spectacle, with the garden based on the shape of a rose flower with the central fountain acting as the stamens.

Lowther offers a wonderful oasis of scent and colour with the dramatic backdrop of Lowther Castle beyond.

- **Restaurant, disabled access to gardens, dog friendly.**

Carolside, Scottish Borders

Carolside is a late 18th century mansion set in beautiful parkland and has one of the most stunning rose gardens in Britain.

The oval walled garden has been cultivated for more than 200 years and was a well-known rose garden in Edwardian days.

Today the garden has an important historical collection of roses and houses a National Collection of pre-1900 Gallica Roses which will take your breath away.

- **Dogs on leads in the garden.**

RHS Rosemoor, Devon

Boasting the largest collection of roses in the Southwest, Rosemoor in North Devon is home to more than 200 different varieties and over 2,000 specimens, ranging from traditional cottage garden climbers to modern varieties, all planted in different settings and combinations in two 'garden rooms'.

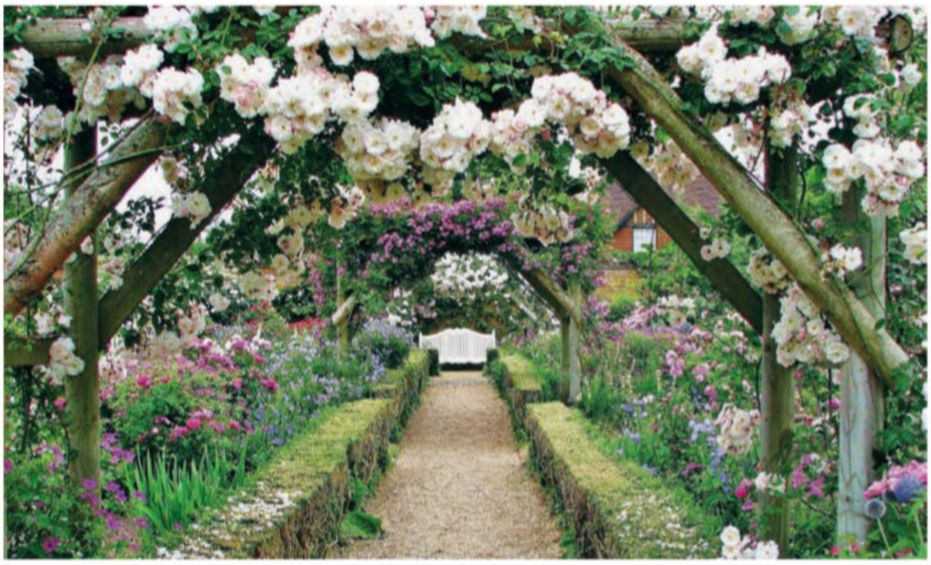
The Queen Mother's Rose Garden features modern roses while the Shrub Rose Garden is planted with older, more traditional rose varieties.

- **Restaurant, disabled access.**

Above: Beautiful displays at Peter Beales Roses, Norfolk

Above: The stunning Dan Pearson-designed new Rose Garden at Lowther Castle, Cumbria

Above: More than 2,000 roses to see at RHS Rosemoor, Devon



Above: Famous and fabulous rose collection at Mottisfont Abbey – Hampshire (National Trust)

Great British GARDENS

For further details on many other rose gardens to visit please visit www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk/seasonal/roses or scan the QR code here.

Your GARDENING TEA BREAK

Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Gardening and the environment

World Environment Day takes place every year on 5 June. Spearheaded by the United Nations, it aims to encourage worldwide awareness of, and action in, protecting the environment.

As gardeners we are responsible for our own immediate environments, but what we do collectively can also impact on national and even international levels. Here are five facts connected to gardening and the environment.

- Due to climatic change, the 'Lake of Pine Trees' in Sweden is now surrounded by birch trees.
- Smoke, smuts and smells from bonfires are the subject of around 30,000 complaints to local authorities every year.
- When you see 'organic seed' for sale, what makes it organic? It must be grown on land that has not been contaminated with synthetic fertilisers or pesticides, for many years at least, and neither should such products have been used on the seeds themselves, or their parent plants.
- On a single day in 2018, volunteers in India planted 66 million trees.
- By using bidets for four years instead of toilet paper, Brits could save 15 million trees.

The numbers...

- **100 –** The number of miles driven in a car, and causing air pollution, that is equal to just one hour of using a petrol-driven lawnmower (according to a Swedish study reported in the June 2013 issue of *Environmental Science and Technology*, the journal of the American Chemical Society).
- **220 –** The number of gallons of water used by an average garden sprinkler in just one hour; this is the equivalent of two days' water consumption by a family of four (the average family uses approximately 110gal/500litres of pure water every day).
- **250 –** the number of different types of wildlife found in an average domestic garden, according to government statistics.

This fortnight in gardening history

30 May 1744 Poet Alexander Pope died. At one point he moved to a large villa at Twickenham where he created a famed grotto and magnificent gardens.

3 June 1713 Robert, 8th Baron Petre, was born. One of the keenest of gardeners and plantsmen of his generation, in 1739 he introduced the first camellias into Britain from China and Japan.

8 June 1897 Brenda Colvin, landscape architect and founder of the Institute of Landscape Architects (now the Landscape Institute), was born, in India.

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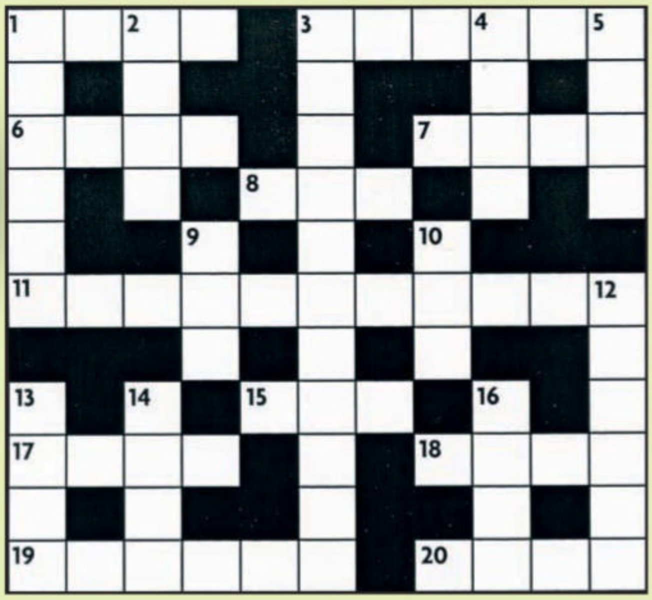
Crossword... *just for fun!*



ACROSS

1 The botanical structures from which peas and beans may be harvested! (4)
3 A pea or bean plant is this! (6)
6 Grains from *Avena sativa* – a widely cultivated cereal grass! (4)
7 Genus of shrubs, originally from New Zealand, often referred to as the shrubby veronica (4)
8 Newly formed leaf or flower that has not yet unfolded (3)
11 Genus of perennials, including the king's spear, with thick, fleshy roots (11)
15 Mythical creature found at the beginning of the busy lizzie genus! (3)
17 Genus of shade-loving plants known variously as lords-and-ladies and cuckoo pint (4)
18 This highly nutritious berry is also known as wolfberry (*Lycium barbarum*) (4)
19 In botany, the part of a stamen that contains the pollen (6)
20 Melissa is lemon ____; trillium is Indian ____; and abies is the ____ of Gilead (4)

DOWN

1 Genus of tropical African shrubs, having alternate rigid leaves and dense colourful flowerheads resembling cones (6)
2 Fruit of the tropical *Phoenix dactylifera* palm (4)
3 The sweet gum tree genus (11)
4 The gorse genus (4)
5 Seeing buds – on spuds! (4)
9 In chives, we see the 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet! (3)
10 Mythical creature found in *Hemerocallis* 'Snow ___' and 'Nutmeg ___' (3)
12 The viper's bugloss genus (6)
13 Hannibal Lecter said he "ate his [victim's] liver with some ____ beans and a nice Chianti!" (4)
14 Cask or barrel, for water in the garden (4)
16 The tropical wax flower genus (4)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE

ACROSS 1 Pods 3 Legume 6 Oats 7 Hebe 8 Bud 11 Asphodeline 15 Imp 17 Arum 18 Goji 19 Anther 20 Balm **DOWN** 1 Protea 2 Date 3 Liquidambar 4 Ulex 5 Eyes 9 Chi 10 Elf 12 Echium 13 Fava 14 Butt 16 Hoya

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KC8830	Alstroemeria 'Indian Summer' 6 Jumbo Plug Plants £71.94	£27.99		
KF5172	Wallflower Constant Cheer 6 Jumbo Plugs £16.99	£14.99		
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THE SELF-SUFFICIENT (ish) GARDENER

with **Andrew Oldham**

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Shrubs help boost diversity and make your garden an attractive home for a wide range of birds

Shrubs for biodiversity and better gardens for us all

How indifference turned to a love of shrubs for **Andrew Oldham**

All images unless otherwise credited: Andrew Oldham

Unlike Monty Python's knights who say 'Ni', who demand King Arthur brings them a shrubbery, I wasn't always a fan of shrubs. I used to see them as something that was caught in a no-man's land between flowers and trees.

For several years I dragged around the only shrub I had, a cotoneaster, which was planted in an old washtub. It went from house to house and then came here to my home at Pig Row, where I instantly forgot about it, dumping it behind a freshly planted hornbeam hedge.

Last year, after a decade of planning to do something with it and instantly rushing off to do something supposedly more enjoyable, I took stock of the bedraggled thing and considered two options: either planting it in the ground or chucking it onto the compost heap.

The fact that I thought of doing the latter sums up my relationship with shrubs. Thankfully, I decided to plant it and for that first year it sat in the soil, sulking. I gave it a hard prune to spur it on, and it sulked further.

Then this spring, it started to come back, greener than before and it did something it had not done

▶

***Photinia* x *fraseri* 'Red Robin' and *Hypericum* 'Hidcote' in one of those gaps made in the cottage garden** Inset: **Look at that photinia foliage**

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Andrew's cottage garden in full bloom where room is now being made for new shrubs

in years, it flowered. I was instantly mesmerised by that early colour in the garden and how bees swarmed over it and I decided to look at shrubs afresh from then on.

Why shrubs matter

As well as providing an important habitat for wildlife, these hard-working plants offer important structure to a garden. I always avoided shrubs due to the cost, as they can be expensive and when you are working on a tight budget, you don't want to splurge when that money can go on something else. But once you have them, then you can expand your collection through propagation, so it's an investment worth making.

There are also practical reasons for me to plant shrubs. I am not getting younger, and though I am active in the vegetable patch, I want to create a sustainable, balanced garden throughout my quarter acre that keeps the soil covered and the wildlife happy.

Andrew's new shrub choices for the cottage garden

The cottage garden for years has largely consisted of cordon apples and pears, a quince and plum tree, some cherry trees and roses, and myriad perennials including daisies, lupins and geraniums.

There were no traditional shrubs so I bought a small *Photinia* x *fraseri* 'Red Robin' that sang out in the garden centre. I paired it with a *Hypericum* x *hidcoteense* 'Hidcote', commonly called St John's Wort, because the idea of yellow and red, paired with the pink of the geranium, the white of the daisy and myriad coloured lupins appealed to me.

I'd like a *Daphne mezereum* var. *rubra* next, a deciduous native with the loveliest of scents and flowers that appear before the leaves in late winter to early spring. It's early nectar for bees who love the purplish-pink flowers that cluster in twos and threes from buds on the twigs before the leaves grow.

I knew shrubs were important to me when a friend offered me a cutting from their philadelphus, or (mock orange). I took several and one survived, and that too will go into the cottage garden.

The exciting thing now is that this move into shrubs is rejuvenating everywhere in my garden, even the vegetable patch, where I will plant another *Hypericum* x *hidcoteense* 'Hidcote' as a windbreak.

For wildlife, for lower-maintenance gardening, for garden protection, my move into the world of shrubbery will provide multiple benefits all-round. Monty Python's Knights who say 'Ni' would be proud!

Jobs for the fortnight

1. Support tall-growing perennials including Jerusalem artichokes. Use canes around the foliage every metre (3ft) on both sides of the plants. Then use a strong string to thread a cat's cradle around and through the stems so they will move in the wind without snapping.

2. Thin out apples. It is tempting to leave all your apples after the June drop – when the trees drop any fruit they cannot carry - but this will result in smaller apples at harvest time. Remove any apples that are small, damaged or misshapen. In a cluster, select one to two large, healthy apples to keep, and remove the others. Also take apples that are shaded or less exposed to sunlight and air to avoid disease.

3. Harvest soft fruit and lettuce. Strawberries are now at their peak and early raspberries are starting to come. Fruit that you will not eat immediately can be frozen and turned into jams when you have enough. Keep harvesting lettuces, as a few warm days can see a lettuce run to seed and then the leaves turn bitter.

4. Successional sowing. Sow lettuces every fortnight in trays to replace what you are harvesting. You can still sow lettuce, runner beans, French beans and sweetcorn directly into the soil.

Thin out apples now to boost results with the quality of harvests

Future thinking – a self-sufficiency idea

Start your winter sowings in your greenhouse or polytunnel now. Sow spring cabbages, Chinese cabbages (Napa cabbage), komatsuna (Japanese mustard spinach) and pak choi for a late-season harvest or winter storage. You can also sow mustard greens and mizuna.

Sow in a tray of peat-free compost, water the compost beforehand, sow the seed and cover with a light sprinkling of sieved compost. The cabbages will fill the hunger gap next year.

Above: Sow now for luscious leaves over winter and into the following spring

About **Andrew Oldham**

■ Andrew Oldham is a self-sufficient(ish) gardener who believes in the joy of down-to-earth growing and cooking. He lives high on the Saddleworth hills with his family at Pig Row. Find him on all social media platforms as **@lifeonpigrow**

TOP HANDY HACKS

With **Adam Kirtland**

How to make a... dainty and decorative garden lantern

Adam explains how to use paper and plants to create a beautiful effect

As the days and evenings grow longer and lighter, the temptation to stay outdoors for 'just five more minutes' gets stronger.

If you're anything like me then you'll be out there right until it's dark and even then you'll have to be dragged back in kicking and screaming. Even when I'm done with the day's gardening, I'm likely to still sit out there, enjoying the sounds, smells and sights of the garden at dusk.

But I do like to have a few additions, perhaps a blanket and a mug of hot chocolate, and some gentle ambient lighting.

Recently I've been making some tissue paper lanterns with my daughters to add some soft illumination to the garden at night when we are outside. They're lit with LED tea lights.

Research has shown that outdoor lighting can be extremely disruptive to wildlife so don't create too much artificial light or leave it shining too long.

Step 1: Choose Your Jar

You can go big or small, but either way, make sure your jar is completely empty and clean of food residue. In this project I've gone for a decent-sized coffee jar, so I've got more space for the exterior design.

Step 2: Get Gluing

Once your jar is prepped and ready to go then you'll need to find yourself some PVA glue. This is the thick white glue that we all used at school for craft projects and you should be able to find it in all stationery or craft supply shops. You don't need too much for this, but a good-sized bottle will allow you the freedom to make more than one jar, which you'll definitely want to do!

Step 3: Pick a Design

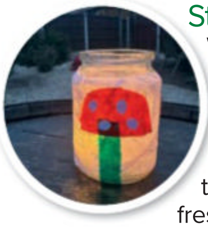
The fun part is creating your design on the jar. This is simple enough to do, but you can let your mind go wild here and create something unique.

Start off by adding a layer of glue to your jar and then begin to build up layers of tissue to form a 'base' – think of this as an undercoat of paint.

Once you've got your base you can make whatever design you like – I've gone with mushrooms, to show you what is possible.

Step 4: The Options are Endless

One other option is to forage leaves, flowers and petals from your garden and add them to your lantern instead of, or as well as, paper. To show you what that might look like I've added some pansies to one side of my jar, and I think they work rather well. I've seen these made before with small ferns and all other manner of foliage. Whatever your choice, make sure to add a final layer of glue over the top to give it a neat finish – don't worry, the glue will dry clear.



Step 5: Light It Up

When your lantern is fully dry, you can either enjoy it as it is or add a tea light and place it outside to illuminate your al fresco evenings.

If you'd like to see a video version of this tutorial to get the full idea of what to do then you'll find that on my Instagram page **@viewfromthepottingbench**

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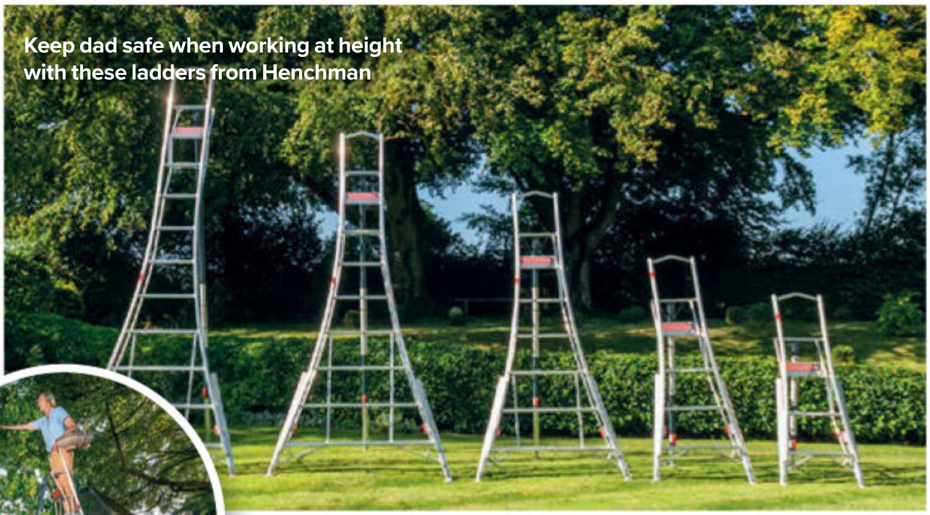
Fantastic Father's Day gift guide

Stuck for inspiration? Here are some ideas to help you on your way



Keep dad safe when working at height with these ladders from Henchman

A high-quality ladder

Ever wobbled precariously on a ladder while pruning up high and worried about safety, even with someone putting their foot on the bottom rung?

Worry no more with the purchase of one of the fully adjustable tripod ladders from the experts at Henchman. Their clever structural engineering technology enables you to adjust leg length to keep you sturdy when working at height and carrying out a wide range of gardening and DIY jobs

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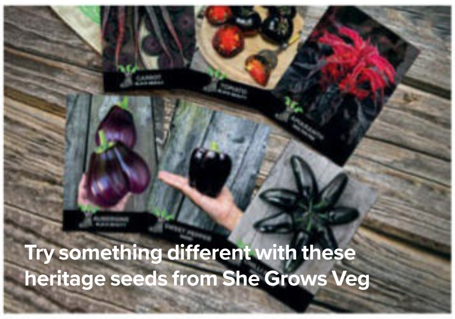

Try something different with these heritage seeds from She Grows Veg

Heritage grow-your-own delights

For keen gardeners and cooks there are some lovely Father's Day open-pollinated seed gifts guaranteed to excite from She Grows Veg. From the Black Veg Pack (£25) to the Beginner's Bundle (£17.50), each collection of heritage seed comes in an eco gift bag with a QR code for simple growing instructions to help dad on his way.

To find out more about SheGrowsVeg and view the whole range, please visit *www.shegrowsveg.com*

Gardena's dual hose box and inset solar panel irrigation system

Get watering wise with Gardena

Ever cursed, sighed or walked away when going to water to plants only to find your hose pipe has got all tangled up yet again? It can very damaging for hose pipes when they get tangled, dangerous too, presenting a potential trip hazard. Fortunately the lovely dual hose box from Gardena can come to the rescue. It can be wall-mounted or carried around the garden as needed and offers a kink-free hose pipe which is safely stored back away tangle-free when not in use. Let twisted hose pipes be a thing of the past! RRP £79.99 from The Range, B&Q, Very and Amazon.

Gardena also offer some excellent solar panel water irrigation products which will help ease the effort with watering this summer and which are also well worth a look.

RRP £179.99 from Amazon and *tooled-up.com*

Clever clean grass strimming from Cobra

For the dad who loves a well-maintained lawn, the Cobra GT600E Electric Grass Trimmer is the perfect gift this Father's Day. With its powerful 600W motor and 30cm cutting width, this trimmer makes quick work of edging and trimming tasks.

The rotating head makes it easy to get around lawn borders, while the lightweight design ensures comfortable use. Whether dad's tackling the lawn or perfecting the edges, this trimmer will make his gardening tasks easier and more enjoyable.

RRP £49.99 widely available.

Because dad deserves it!

Why not also treat dad to a well-earned break in the garden this Father's Day with Home & Garden Extra's outdoor wine bottle and glass holder sticks. Perfect for enjoying a glass of wine on a sunny afternoon, this clever set holds a bottle and four glasses securely in the ground – no more spills on the lawn or balancing acts on uneven tables! Ideal for barbecues, picnics, or simply relaxing outdoors, it's a thoughtful gift for any garden-loving father.

Available from *www.homesandgardensextras.com*

Make spilt wine a thing of the past with help from Home & Garden Extra

GROWING FROM SEED

with **Ruth Hayes**, *AG*'s gardening expert

Don't forget to sow this brilliant biennial!

Easy-going forget-me-nots bring joy to every garden

The twinkling blue of a clump of forget-me-nots is one of the sweetest sights of spring.

They are incredibly easy to grow and once you've added them to your garden, they are with you for the long haul thanks to their propensity to self-seed with abandon.

I love them, and they love our garden, possibly because there is plenty of dappled shade cast by several trees - the 'sylvatica' in their Latin name *Myosotis sylvatica* hints at the plant's woodland origins.

Forget-me-nots are biennials and if sown now, either directly onto prepared soil or in pots of good quality seed compost, they will spring up and open their sweet blue eyes next spring, providing essential food for early pollinators.

'Royal Blue Improved' is a smashing variety that flowers early in the season, producing a mass of indigo-blue flowers.

Not only are these blooms a magnet for bees and bee-flies, they carry a delicious scent and make a wonderful visual feast when sprinkled over desserts.

Forget-me-nots will grow well in sun and light shade, so decide where you want to sow them and prepare the soil by clearing away weeds and stones and raking it to a fine crumbly tilth before watering.

Scatter the seeds thinly and cover with a light layer of soil. Mark the border to avoid disturbing it when gardening, and thin any seedlings that are growing too close together when they start to emerge.

In autumn, carefully transplant seedlings to their final flowering position and look forward to a blaze of blue heralding the spring in a few months' time.

Above: 'Royal Blue Improved' is an early variety of forget-me-not with deep blue blooms

All images credit: © Shutterstock

On red alert for summer colour

These easy annuals are great value for money

- If you're looking for an easy-going annual that packs a punch of colour and is happy in poor soil, then California poppies are the gardener's go-to.
- Although the most common colour is a glossy deep orange, the variety 'Red Chief' lives up to its name and produces flowers in an eye-popping shade of fire-engine red set above delicate grey-green foliage.
- These poppies are the state flower of California, where they thrive in warm dry conditions, and they will grow just as well in free-draining UK gardens, even those with poor, thin soil.
- Prepare the ground as you would with the forget-me-nots, and cast the seeds freely. Cover with a little more soil and gently firm it down.
- Keep the seedbed just damp and weed-free and deter cats by puffing some pepper or chilli powder over the top.
- California poppies will flower right through to the autumn and happily self-seed.

'Red Chief' California poppies provide a blast of brilliant red

What's On

30-31 May: Scone Palace Garden Fair, Scone Palace, Perth, Scotland, PH2 6BD. 10am-5pm.
30 May: Bournemouth Orchid Society AGM & Plant Auction, 39 Christchurch Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 3NS.
31 May: Dundonnell House Garden Opening & Plant Stall, Little Loch Broom, Wester Ross, Scotland, IV23 2QW. 2-5pm.
31 May: Lindfield Village Day, The Common in Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 2EB. Noon-5pm.
31 May: Rhododendrons at Mellerstain, Mellerstain House and Gardens, Gordon, Scotland, TD3 6LG. 11am-5pm.
1 June: Plant Fairs Roadshow Early Summer Plant Fair, Hole Park Gardens, Benenden Road, Rolvenden, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 4JA. 11am-4pm.
1 June: Felley Priory June Plant Fair, Felley Priory, Underwood, Nottinghamshire, NG16 5FJ.
1 June: Rare Plant Fair, High Glanau Manor, Lydart, Monmouth, Monmouthshire, Wales, NP25 4AD. 11am-4pm.
1 June: Quercus Garden Plants' Charity Opening, Quercus Garden Plants, Whitmuir Farm, West Linton, Scotland, EH46 7BB. 10am-5pm.
1 June: Norton Priory Plant Hunters' Fair, Norton Priory, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 1SX. 10am-4pm.
5-7 June: Wealden Times Midsummer Fair, Hole Park, Benenden Road, Rolvenden, Kent, TN17 4JA.
6-8 June: The Garden Show at Broadlands, Broadlands, Romsey, Hampshire SO51 9ZD.
6-8 June: Chatsworth Garden Fair, Chatsworth House, Bakewell, Derbyshire, East Midlands, DE45 1PP.
6-7 June: Jekka's June Herb Days: Bee & Pollinator Herbs, Jekka's, Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Avon, Bristol, BS35 3SY. 9am-4pm.
7-8 June: Hellens Garden Festival, Hellens, Much Marcle, Near Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 2LY.
7 June: East Ruston Old Vicarage Plant Fair, East Ruston Old Vicarage, East Ruston, Norwich, Norfolk, NR12 9HN. 10am-4.30pm.
7-8 June: Gardeners' Fair at Burton Agnes Hall, Burton Agnes Hall, Driffield, East Yorkshire, YO25 4NE. 10am-5pm.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to **pumpkinbeth.com** for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to **editor@amateurgardening.com** Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

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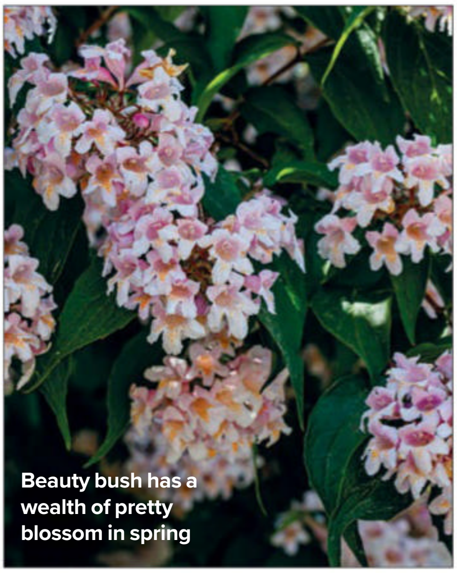
Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

We're looking for a small tree for a narrow garden

An upright cotoneaster or flowering shrub might fit the bill



Beauty bush has a wealth of pretty blossom in spring

Q I'm looking to add a small tree to our narrow garden, something that still leaves room to walk around but that will make a statement all year. What would you recommend?
Julian Easton (via email)

A I suggest that you plant *Cotoneaster* 'Hybrid Pendulous', an evergreen with weeping branches and attractive red berries.

Growing to around 2.4m (8ft), it makes an elegant small tree which would be in perspective with the width of your garden, so you would have room to walk comfortably by it.

Most trees, however – rowans, hollies, birches, ornamental apples and pears and Japanese cherries, apart from 'Amanogawa' - a slender variety that would also be suitable for the site you have in mind – would quickly outgrow the space you are thinking about.

Alternatively, you may prefer to plant a large shrub. One of the most appealing is the beauty bush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*) whose arching branches are sleeved with a wealth of small pink blooms from May to June.

You could either plant a new tree/shrub now and be prepared to water it through the summer, or wait until the autumn when the soil will still be warm, and possibly easier to work, having been dampened with seasonal rain.

What has attacked our 'Conference' pear?

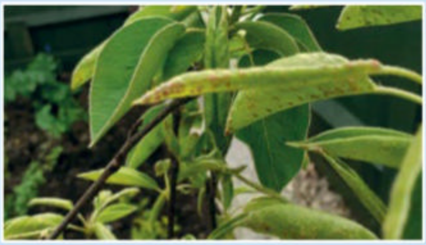
Q My pear tree seems to have curled leaves and brown spots underneath, I brought it last year, and the same happened. Can you help me with this?
Barbara Petty (via email)

A Thanks to the excellent images that you sent us, we can categorically say that your 'Conference' pear has been attacked by pear blister mites.

Virtually microscopic – just 0.2mm long – they feed on leaf sap and cause brown spots to blemish the foliage.

Pleasingly, though they cause leaves to narrow they have little impact on growth and cropping, so please don't use insecticides against them which will harm other insects.

Hopefully, provided you feed your tree monthly with a balanced granular fertiliser from April to September and water it in if the soil is dry, new leaves and growth should be normal.



Above: Pear blister mites are a common pest that do little damage

Quick questions & answers

Glasshouse red spider mites suck sap and weaken plants

What made our plants suffer?

Q Last year the leaves on the tomato plants in my greenhouse went sort of blotchy and fell off. What is the likely cause and can I stop it this year?
Emily Crocker, West London

A I suspect that your plants were infested with glasshouse red spider mite. If fine webs are seen, then this pest is definitely responsible.

They suck the sap from plants, weakening them and causing discolouration.

The best way to beat them is to damp down the greenhouse to raise humidity, which they hate, or introduce a predatory biological control such as the mites *Amblyseius andersoni* or *Phytoseiulus persimilis* to combat the attack.

This biological control can be bought at www.greengardener.co.uk, call 01493 750061.

What will this grow into?

Q Please can you identify this plant that has self-seeded or been planted by squirrels in one of my garden tubs. I'd like to plant it somewhere in the garden properly but I'm not sure what it is and how big it will grow.
Liz Goulds, Chesterfield, Derbyshire

A The interloper is pussy willow, also called goat willow or great sallow (*Salix caprea*).

A native of NW Eurasia, including Britain and Ireland, male trees produce chunky golden catkins, while those of female trees are silvery.

If you decide to keep it, transplant it in autumn to an open, sunny spot to grow without crowding other plants.

Right: Goat willows are easily spread by fine, lightweight seeds

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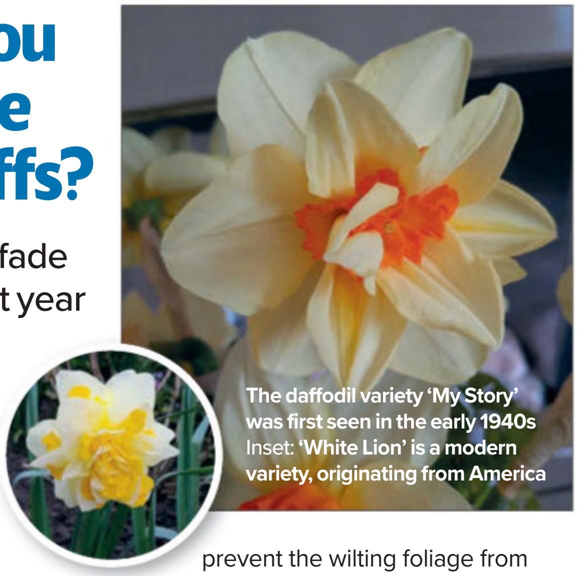
Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Please can you identify these gorgeous daffs?

Feed daffodils as they fade for good flowering next year



The daffodil variety 'My Story' was first seen in the early 1940s
Inset: **'White Lion' is a modern variety, originating from America**

Q Please are you able to identify these two daffodils. They are very beautiful but unfortunately we do not know their names...
Chris Woolf (via email)

A What beautiful daffodils. The double orange and white variety is probably 'My Story'. Introduced around 1940, it has great appeal.

Indeed, it so turned heads at the RHS that botanists there had no hesitation in honouring it with the prestigious Award of Garden Merit.

As for the white and yellow bloom, I suspect that it is 'White Lion', registered in Oregon, USA in 2005. It's also an AGM winner.

As your daffodils start to fade, leave them alone to die back naturally as removing or knotting the leaves will prevent the wilting foliage from returning goodness to the bulbs for next year's display.

Liquid feed them with a general purpose fertiliser to help the bulbs bulk up.

You can remove the withered foliage when it has completely died back and look forward to another beautiful display next year.

You should follow this course of action whether your bulbs are in the soil or in pots - though if you wish to use the pots for a summer display, carefully remove the bulbs and store them somewhere cool and dry and replant them in the autumn.

How can I propagate our rowan tree?

Q We have a beautiful sorbus, which I think is the variety 'Pink Pagoda'. I'd like to make more plants, so when is the best time to propagate it, and how?
Claire Mitchell (via email)

Above: 'Pink Pagoda' is a pretty variety of *sorbus*, or rowan

A The best way to propagate *Sorbus* 'Pink Pagoda', which is a truly beautiful variety of rowan, is to take 10 to 15cm (4-6in)softwood shoot-tip cuttings in late spring.

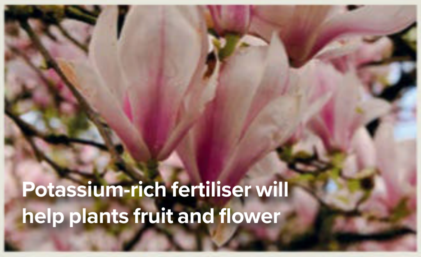
Remove the growing tip and make a cut just below a joint at the base. If leaves are large, slice them in half.

Finally, dip cuttings in hormone rooting powder or liquid and insert them to half their length around the edge of a 4in/10cm pot filled with gritty rooting compost.

Consign them to a heated propagator or cover the pot with a clear plastic bag and position it on a warm, south-facing windowsill.

New growth will indicate that roots have formed, which is usually within six weeks.

Quick questions & answers



Potassium-rich fertiliser will help plants fruit and flower

Why didn't our magnolia shine?

Q Our magnolia didn't flower terribly well this year. How can we get it to do better next year?
Barbara Rowan (via email)

A I am sorry that your magnolia is a shy performer and that you have had only one or two rather late blooms.

The best way to encourage it to flower more freely is to feed it with sulphate of potash. Sprinkle it over the root area, monthly, from April to September and repeat annually. Water it in.

Potassium is a great flower inducer. It helps wood ripen which triggers blooms to form.

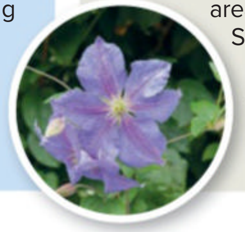
Will our unpruned clematis flower?

Q We have a *Clematis* 'Perle d'Azure'. It should be pruned early in the year but we haven't had time this year, so will it still flower?
Terry Smith, Wantage

A Also known as 'Virgin's Bower', 'Perle d'Azur' is a beautiful clematis that produces a proliferation of gorgeous flowers.

Happily, it will continue to do so in spite of your not pruning it in February, when all shoots are normally shortened to within a pair of buds 23cm (9in) from the base.

Though it appears to be flourishing, help it bloom even more by feeding it with a balanced fertiliser, such as Vitax Q 4. Sprinkle it over the root area, monthly, from April to September and water it in.



Left: Clematis will flower, but prune it next year

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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What is this exotic arrival?

Wild gladioli are considered weeds but are very pretty

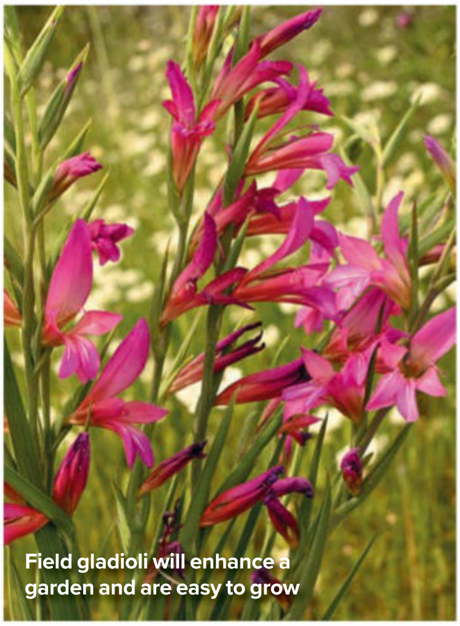
Q Can you identify this very pretty but unexpected plant that appeared in our garden? It is rather lovely, but should we keep it?
Melanie Waters (via email)

A How wonderful, you have *Gladiolus italicus*, or field gladiolus, which can be bought as corms in this country but grows wild as a weed of cultivated ground from France southwards to North Africa and eastwards to Romania, Central Asia and Iran.

I suspect someone in your neighbourhood has some growing, and they would then have produced seeds which a bird may have devoured.

It then flew into your garden where one of them was deposited and produced the very unusual plant in question.

Also known as common sword lily, it will thrive in most soils as long as it is reasonably sheltered, drains well and gets lots of sunshine.



Field gladioli will enhance a garden and are easy to grow

Characteristically, all flowers face in the same direction. Indisputably, it has an innate charm, so nurture and enjoy it. If you live in the north or have heavy clay soil, it may be worth lifting in the autumn and storing somewhere dry and frost-free until the following spring.

Are these weeds or can I keep them?

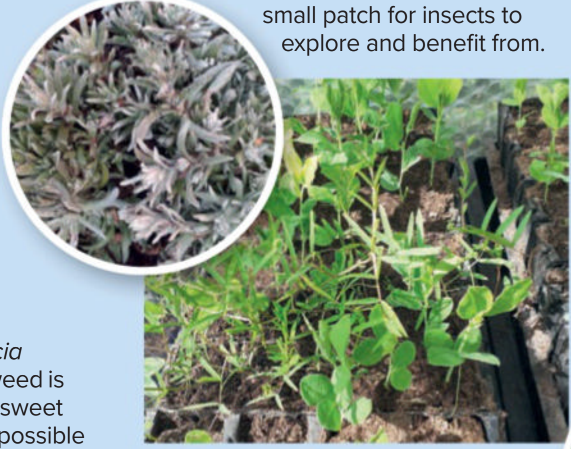
Q Please could you tell me what is growing alongside my sweet peas in their root trainers, it must have been in the compost. Also can you identify this silver, soft leaved, low growing plant that has arrived in our raised bed.
Lesley Hough (via email)

A Bad luck! Slender tare (*Vicia laxiflora*), an indigenous weed is jostling for space among your sweet peas, so remove it as soon as possible before it dominates and spoils your display. Pleasingly it is shallow rooted and easily removed.

The silvery slender-leaved wild flower is common cudweed (*Filago vulgaris*).

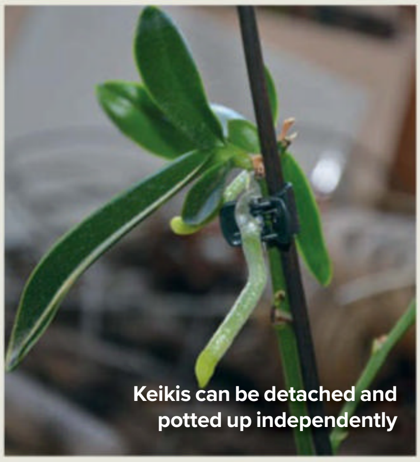
A lover of light sandy soils, its yellowish-red blooms which appear in summer have eye appeal and warrant close inspection.

I suggest that you leave a small patch for insects to explore and benefit from.



Above: Tares are a weed but common cudweed, inset, will help pollinators

Quick questions & answers



Keikis can be detached and potted up independently

What to do with orchid babies!

Q Our orchid has produced babies! Can we detach them and grow them?
Derek Thompson, West Wales

A They are called keikis and best ways to propagate the two that have formed is to wait until shoots are about 3in (7cm) long, then detach them with as many roots as possible.

Ideally, set plants in transparent pots of epiphytic orchid mixture, keeping their silvery aerial roots above the compost.

Water them in with clean rain water and position them in light shade, simulating how they grow in nature, when attached to trees.

It gets a seal of approval

Q I was given this by a friend but haven't a clue what it is - and neither did she! Can you help please?
Christine Cox (via email)

A It is called false Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*). A native of North America and Mexico, it adds charm and character to a sunny or lightly shaded border.

Its flowers are remarkably beautiful and if you wish to propagate it, divide it in October and plant chunky, well-rooted divisions in humus-rich soil.

Left: False Solomon's seal will thrive in light shade

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Your LETTERS TO KIM

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Your lovely letters, emails and social media posts continue to flow in beautifully. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

Learning as we grow

Good afternoon Kim
I have a new, south-facing garden that I am slowly digging up and planting up with everything I fancy! I thought I would have a go at creating my own arch, and failed! It was dismantled the following day, but I still feel proud for giving it a go.

Thank you to Ruth Hayes for celebrating garden centre plug plants, as it provides them with an income, plus growing seeds is not that easy. My vegetable seeds have done well though.

I love the magazine as it is so helpful and I learn so much. Thank you.

Kind regards
Ruth Hill

Kim says; thank you Ruth for sharing this lovely image and writing in. The warm start to the year has been lovely but left some seedlings frazzled so guilt-free plug plant buying will help. I love the fact you have shared the structure you built even though it was later taken down. Often the process in itself of make, mend and do can be incredibly useful and not everything works first time round. It's how we learn and grow.

Ruth's new garden with home-made arch attempt

Look before you mow as insects like this cinnabar moth may be in the grass

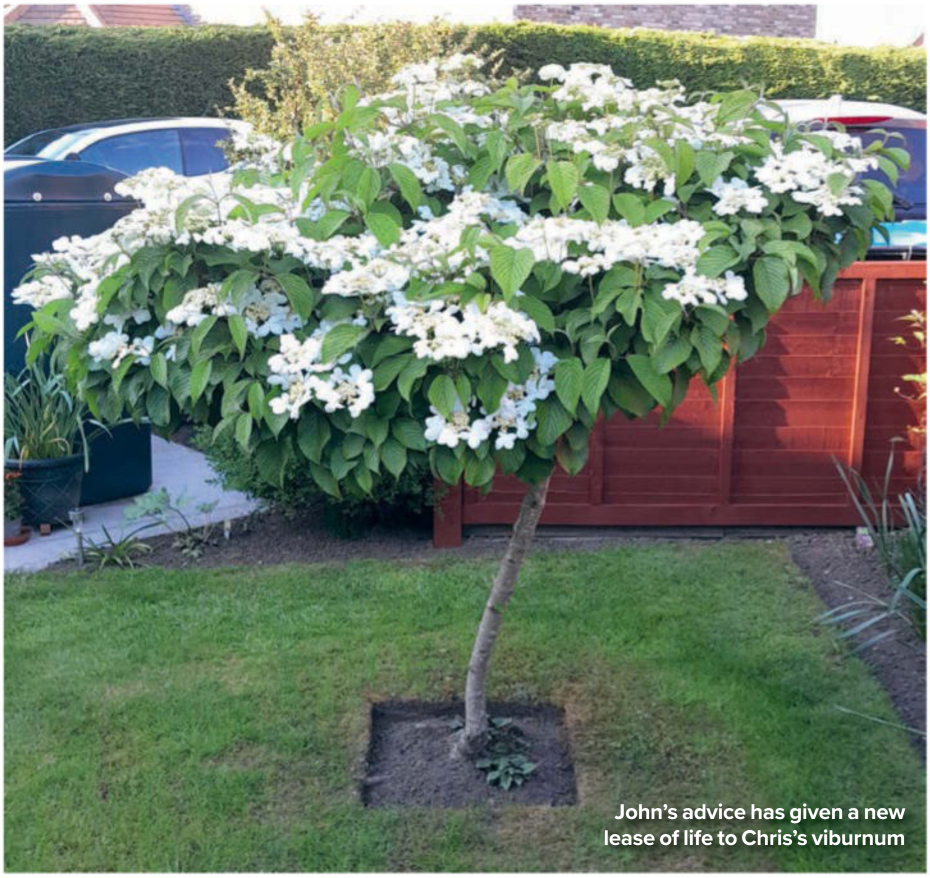
© Shutterstock

Be careful when mowing

Dear Kim
We did no Now Mow May last year and had a large patch of long grass.My worry was the amount of little froglets we hurt when we did mow!!

Regards
Sharron Reynolds

Kim says; thank you for sharing your experience Sharron, and you make a really valid point. When using machinery it can be hard to see what might lie beneath, especailly in long grass. I tend to test an area gently or walk a path and brush my hands through the grass to check before mowing or strimming to help anything hiding in it to move safely out the way. Whether frogs, newts, moths or butterflies, there are many creatures that could be hiding so go slowly as you mow.



John's advice has given a new lease of life to Chris's viburnum

Blooming marvellous advice from *AG*'s John Negus

Dear Kim
Some time ago I asked John Negus for some advice regarding this small tree in my garden which was looking very unhappy and looked as if it was dying. We followed his advice at the time and as you can see our lovely tree is now blooming.
Thank you John!

Best regards
Chris Woolf

Kim says; John was delighted to read your email Chris, that's so nice to see the positive impact his pages have with lovely hands-on gardening advice for readers.

Please send us your letters, poems and musings

Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

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Happy hen: Christopher's 13-year-old bantam

Garden pets

Dear Kim
This is our amazing 13-year-old golden partridge bantam.

We do wonder if she is perhaps a record breaker, as you can see from the picture she is still laying eggs at the grand age of 13 .

Having outlived her sisters, we do feel her longevity is down to a good diet with spoils from the garden, and her comfortable housing, plus the cider vinegar added to her drinking water daily. I would love to hear from other readers who may also have older hens which are still laying.

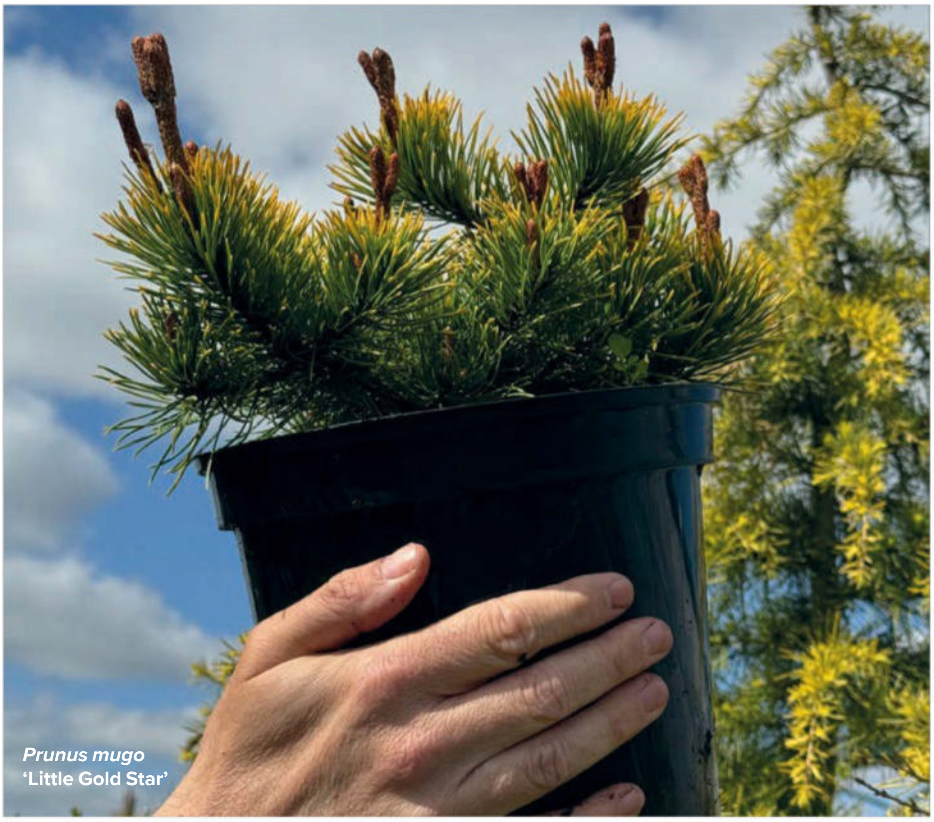
Thanks
Christopher John Walpole

Kim says; thank you Christopher - that is so lovely to hear. She looks so well cared for with her perky plumage, and that's great advice about the daily cider vinegar in her water. It is good for humans and chickens alike. We have talked about doing an article on chicken keeping and I have hens myself so, dear readers, please do let us know your experiences/ tips for older chickens and pets in general, after all, we love to share our gardens with precious pets.

PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman



Prunus mugo 'Little Gold Star'

Six of the best conifers

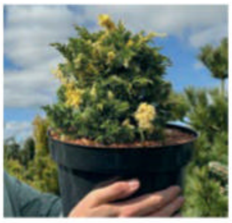
Michael reveals some of his favourite specimens and explains why conifers are coming back big time

Conifers are king again! It's a plant family that can offer so much, from evergreen colour to wildlife habitat, carbon capture to durable drought tolerance. And, all is not what it seems either, not all conifers look like great strapping leylandii hedges - there are a lot of different shapes and sizes, as you're about to discover!

Pinus mugo 'Little Gold Star'

A conifer that will thrive in all soils, and is hardy down to a staggering -20C too! A medium-speed conifer, reaching 2m (6.5ft) eventually, it's a great feature plant to plan into a rockery, or into containers, with a well-behaved globular habit.

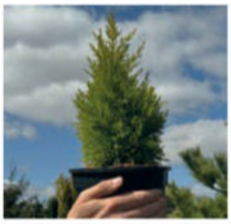
Flowering in spring, and a surprise pollen source for bees, the tightly packed needles have a yellow tinge, creating an effervescent glow in borders.



Juniperus chinensis 'Kaizuka Variegata'

This conifer is quite a shapeshifter, with an upright habit, yet irregular outline. Each stem seems to appear different, both in shape and tone as the plant produces foliage in both blue-green and creamy-yellow. It's so quirky, of course I love it!

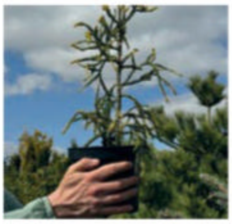
Easy to manage and could eventually reach 1.5m (5ft) in a garden setting. When young, I think this cultivar would make a fantastic container specimen, I can just imagine it mixed up with a few summer petunias and frothy lobelia.



Cupressus macrocarpa 'Wilma'

You might feel like this is quite a familiar conifer, as it's often sold ready-planted in a mixed pot with pansies, primroses and all. 'Wilma' shines bright, with golden feathery foliage, which curiously smells of lemons.

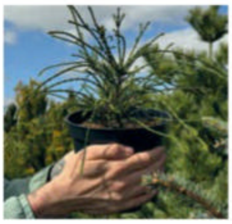
The ultimate height of this cupressus is more than 2m (6,5ft) though, so its time as a container specimen will be limited. However, with careful planning, you can use many conifers for container mix-ups when young, later transferring them to their final locations.



Cryptomeria japonica 'Kyara Gold'

Now here's where conifers start to get really different. Cryptomeria are an awesome family of trees and are well worth delving into. 'Kyara Gold' features highly unique 'corkscrew' stems, which have a golden tinge too.

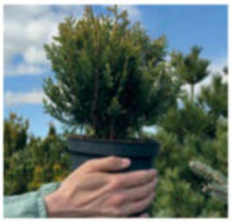
Plan your planting with the knowledge that this conifer grows around 10cm (4in) per year and can eventually reach 1m (3.3ft) in height.



Thuja plicata 'Whipcord'

The ideal conifer for kids to grow? I think so! An incredibly different looking type of thuja, which has the effect of a rather racy hairdo! As it matures, it forms a dome of whipcord-like foliage, the whole plant turning bronze for the autumn.

Will tolerate moist soils, as long as they are moist, and reaches 1.5m (5ft) at maturity. Plus, it's a holder of the most coveted RHS Award of Garden Merit.



Thuja plicata 'Little Boy'

Here's a contender for a box (buxus) alternative, as this *Thuja* 'Little Boy' can grow around 25cm (10in) per year and is easily clippable. The mature height tops out at 1m (3.3ft), which keeps it very manageable.

The compact growth also responds well to shaping and this plant has another surprise up its sleeve though, as the foliage turns orange-bronze for the winter. Absolutely ideal for containers, low hedging or clipping into a chicken!

www.mrplantgeek.substack.com

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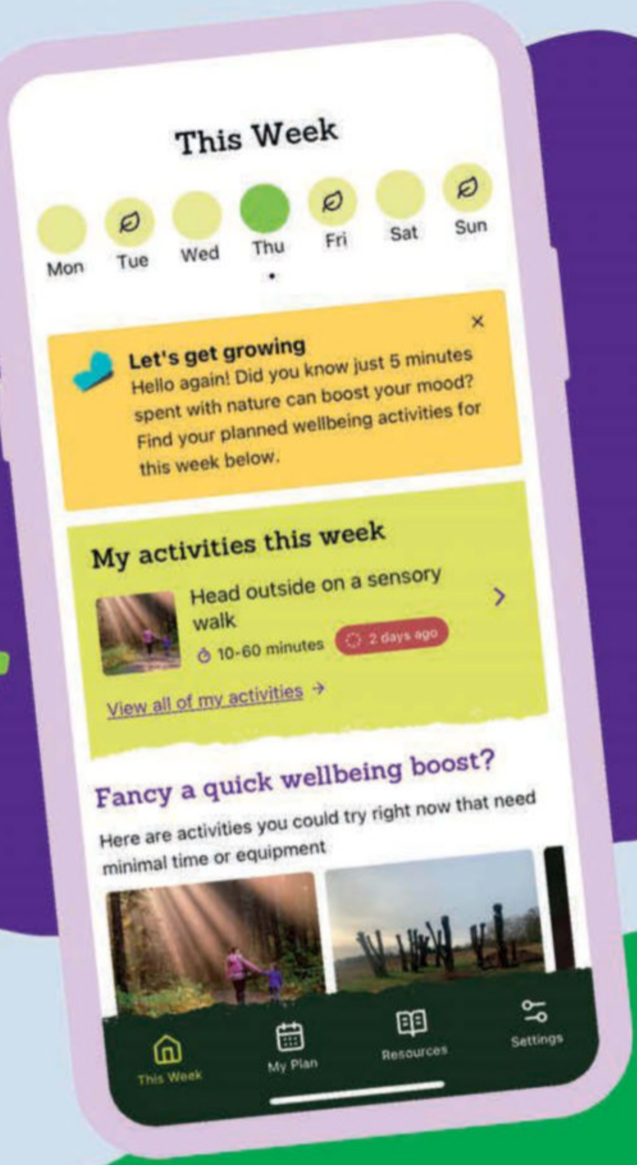

This Week

Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun

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TOBY'S TALKING
WEED OUTWITTING

Organic gardening methods have evolved and cover everything from talking and tending to plants naturally, to embracing new time-saving technologies

Old and new solutions to good garden management

Toby explains how he's using flower power and new technology to make life easier

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Research by NASA has confirmed what King Charles has known all along: talking to plants can help their growth. In tests, yucca, yarrow, you-name-it, all photosynthesise more efficiently when washed with sound waves from a human voice. Who knew! Apart from King Charles obvs.

This experiment was on my mind because I caught up with an old friend who worked for NASA, travelling the world from Cape Canaveral to Kazakhstan to

New technologies such as robot lawn mowers can make gardening a lot easier

Toby explains how he plans to beat the gravel weeds organically

© Toby Buckland

Above: Toby has a floral solution to the weeds growing in the gravelled area of the kitchen garden he cares for

keep satellites in orbit. When he started, these heavenly bodies were kept in position manually. Then, as an experiment, a computer was rigged up to take over while maintenance took place and to the surprise of everyone at Mission Control, it flew the satellite far more efficiently because unlike human pilots, it didn't 'muck about' with the joystick and as a consequence used far less fuel.

The idea that machines could be better at something that requires 'the human touch' was unthinkable then and is still uncomfortable now. But it's even happening in gardening. Robotic mowers have been around for more than 30 years and in that time the tech has come a long way. I owned one of the original designs and it would frequently get stuck on the slightest divot and run out of battery power in inconvenient places miles from a plug.

The cutting method was also haphazard because the machine 'bounced' around randomly inside a loop of buried copper wire that ran around the edge of the lawn. The machine had a sensor that spun the machine around when it encountered the cable, but mine often crossed it and ended up marooned in a border chewing on the flowers.

Modern robot mowers may lead the way

Many contemporary robot mowers are wireless and use GPS, so their movements can be programmed to cut even complicated areas, add stripes where they're wanted or even adjust their cutting height to create paths or draw logos or write messages in the sward. Just think of the 'Anglo Saxon' you could write for the benefit of the neighbours! They're also self-sufficient, automatically heading to their charging stations to top up on power, or when there's a shower, and can cut day and night.

Few greenkeepers would like to admit it, but because they are small and light they don't compact the soil and their tireless frequent cutting means that the grass grows thicker and better than when given a weekly mechanical mow.

Lawns are just the start. I'm hoping it won't be too long before the machines have other attachments, like brushes or a hoe, to keep large gravelled areas weed-free.

The Victorian kitchen garden in my care has a huge gravel patch that's the size of two tennis courts. Hoeing is a regular task as, being organic, weedkiller isn't an option and although I enjoy the rattle-ring of hoeing, it's very time consuming. But I have a solution that would make King Charles proud.

If you can't beat them, join them

Although I'm not one to talk to plants, I have listened to what the gravel-hogging weeds have to say. Obviously, they don't actually 'say' anything but the fact that they're thriving speaks volumes.

By all accounts they shouldn't be doing so well as the gravel is deep and below it is 15cm (6in) of hardcore with weed-proof membrane just below the surface. Trying to beat them isn't working so instead I'm joining them with sun-loving flowers that will out-compete the weeds, or at least make them less obvious. After all, if the native docks and plantain like the conditions it means other flowers will also be able to establish.

Annuals that live for one season are, by nature, excellent colonisers and if sown in the chippings now, will perform in the first year. Top of my list are bright orange California poppy, wispy Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*), snapdragons and delicately ruffled bread seed poppies. I know they'll grow because when planted or sown in borders they peter out because they loathe the close company ▶

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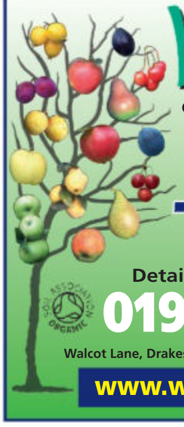

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Welsh poppies as well as California poppies will grow well in gravel

Perennial purple *Verbena bonariensis* will also be used by Toby to help keep weeds at bay

Zingy green lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) helps in the war against weeds

Above: Sea kale is another robust perennial that will thrive in areas of gravel

of others, but often pop up again in cracks in paving where they have more light and leg-room.

Many biennials and short-lived perennials are brilliant candidates for rubble and gravel too, growing as leafy rosettes in their first year before flowering profusely and setting seed in their second. Of the biennials, the classic furry, silver-leaved giant mullein is excellent, with flower spikes that rise to be head-high topped with yellow flowers. Miss Wilmott's ghost, aka giant sea holly (*Eryngium giganteum*), is another winner with a deep tap root and architectural silver thistles.

Sow in lines for easy identification

The gravel-growing perennials are longer-lived and although available as plants like the annuals, they're best sown from seed to increase their chances of gaining a toehold. Also, if they sprout in the gravel, it's all they know and the plants will grow according to the conditions, maybe a little smaller than in good soil but a whole lot tougher.

My pick of the perennials includes purple *Verbena bonariensis* that'll form forests of tall, wiry stems topped with bee-attracting purple flowers. At ground level I've sown the dust-like seed of zingy green lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) plus a few sea kale to form tortoise-shell domes amongst the chippings. I figure if they grow on a beach they'll grow in my gravel.

When sowing wildflowers or any seed in a border that also contains weed seed, I mix the seeds that I think will look good together and sprinkle them in lines or definite circular patches. As the seeds sprout, the geometric lines make them easy to differentiate from the weeds which come up randomly and can still be hoed out to reduce competition. As the flowers grow and a few flop over, the lines and circles blur together and the regimented look becomes more natural.

If it doesn't, I go 'full NASA' and give them a good talking to.

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GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing *AG* contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

5 ways to protect fruit harvests

Bob reveals some ingenious natural methods to keep fruit safe from feathered foragers

Make sure you get to your juicy berries before the birds snaffle the lot!

© Shutterstock

I love garden birds - who doesn't? - but when I 'share' my cherries with them they take the blooming lot. And that's a problem, as just a few birds left unchecked will quickly decimate our ripening crops, particularly soft fruits. They just can't resist those sweet moist morsels, robbing our currants and berries remorselessly.

Birds have preferences and can be fooled, so yellow raspberries remain untouched when positioned next to apparently 'riper' red versions. Likewise, red currants disappear in a flash while white currants hang on, and yellow pyracantha berries long outlast the orange. Green gooseberries may escape for a while too, whereas dark red fruits are soon gone.

The delicious Japanese wineberry has small orange-red 'black berries' which birds ignore as not 'ripe'.

(The cunning wasps are not so easily fooled by colour as they can 'test' fruits to know when they are at their sweetest - often a good indicator for us of which to pick.)

Birds use berries for moisture so give them water

Now rather surprisingly we can reduce losses to birds by providing them with many sources of water. You see, birds have very fast metabolisms, they can run on sugar but mostly live on insects, or on seeds, which although small are packed full of goodies.

© Shutterstock

Above: Birds seek out berries for moisture so leave out water bowls to help protect harvests

Pulpy soft fruit seeds are of little value to them as most pass through their little systems too speedily. The sugar is of course as addictive to birds as it is to us but it's the moisture they're really after. Birds need a lot of water, because they're running hot inside their insulation suits of plumage and flying is, let's face it, hard work. Thus much of the damage they do is for the water content of our pulpy fruits and succulent young seedlings, particularly beetroot and salad leaves.

Therefore the more bird baths we provide the better, and you should provide some water on the ground in old breakfast bowls or similar, as these are also handy for hedgehogs. For birds' comfort ideally put them in the open in the middle of a patio or lawn, or up on top of something such as a flat roof where they are safer from cats.

Other ways to protect precious fruits

And that's the cue for the next measure, for what crazy bird would eat within pouncing distance of a snoozing moggie? A fake fur moggie can work as a deterrent just as well, initially, but birds are clever and soon realise a non-moving cat is no deterrent so we need to move it about during the day.

Fortunately birds are also really scared of snakes and giant spiders and their webs, so we can alternate fake cats with giant fake spiders, and a painted hosepipe snake or three. I found old wigs are given a wide berth if hung up to look like some ghastly spiderish threat.

Bob also uses organza drawstring gift bags to protect fruits

© Bob Flowerdew

This can all end up looking a bit Halloweenish, so if you are concerned about the neighbours' approval, you may be better off sticking to the alternative of netting. A walk-in fruit cage is the most effective and least effort once erected, but individual pieces of fine net fitted over a frame and held in place with clothes pegs also work well.

Always make sure they are pulled taut and any loose ends are tucked neatly away, so you don't snare birds and hedgehogs.

Organza drawstring 'gift' bags are another idea as they neatly enclose choice fruits, defeating birds and also excluding wasps and flies.

Whichever you choose to use, do it now as otherwise tomorrow our feathered friends will have scoffed the lot!

You can find out more about Bob via his website **www.bobflowerdew.com** and what's happening in his garden via Twitter (now X) **@FlowerdewBob**

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